History and Archaeology
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A SUBSTANTIAL EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE: THE NORTHERN COMMERCIAL COMPANY STORE, DAWSON, 1897-1951

Margaret Archibald

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Cover: (*Top*) Front Street 1897 and (*bottom*) First Avenue ca. 1908, Dawson. (Drawings by A. Saito.)

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INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Commercial Company in Dawson

The Alaska Commercial Company had been sealing along the coast of Alaska and trading on the Yukon River for 30 years when it established a post at Dawson in 1897. In 1867 the San Francisco-based firm of Hutchison, Kohl and Company had purchased from the Russian-American Company all interests in the new American territory of Alaska. The Alaska Commerical Company (incorporated as such a year later) continued trading and, after 1886, began to ship gold out of the Yukon River valley.[1] Where successive gold camps sprang up the company maintained commissioned agents who outfitted miners and prospectors from river posts at Stewart, Forty Mile, Ogilvie and Circle City.

The company provisioned the Klondike district for over 70 years, from its construction of a post there in 1897 to the final sale of its Dawson assets in 1969. In that period the company not only dominated the wholesale and retail trade in Dawson, but as a corporate citizen played a major role in the community's political and social life as well. Economically, company policies affected the quality of life in the north in very real ways. From its nearly monopolistic position the company held no small responsibility in determining freight rates, the availability and prices of retail goods, the value of pelts and the extension of credit. Politically, too, managers exerted considerable informal power and influence in Dawson, and consequently displayed high and respectable profiles in the city's social life. Because at various times the company provided a range of services from steam heat and a fire brigade to hockey teams and children's river excursions, the firm's public image was always strong.

The significance of the Alaska - after 1901 the Northern - Commercial Company to Dawson was strongly stated in its physical presence there. The company store dominated the corner of Front and King (so called the A.C. corner) for nearly 55 years, until fire destroyed the property in December, 1951. From its commercially strategic location as a point of trans-shipment the post originally connected Dawson's waterfront with the trail to the goldfields. In its later urban setting the expanded complex maintained its commanding position, defining the industrial and warehousing district on the one flank and overlooking the business district on the other. As the company expanded so did its landholdings, on King Street as well as along the waterfront. At all stages of development the company represented - outside the federal government - Dawson's largest single land user.

Phases Summarized

The structural history of the Alaska/Northern Commercial Company store in Dawson can be summarized as follows:

Phase I: 1897-98 Construction (Fig. 1)

In 1897 the Alaska Commercial Company constructed a log store on the Dawson waterfront. Two warehouses, staff quarters and the store formed what was then the largest river trading post on the Yukon River. The store, reported to measure 80 ft by 40 ft, was a two-storey gabled building of spruce logs, with a small annex at the southeast corner. it was accessible to the waterfront, the Third Street trail to the creeks and the warehouse area in the centre of the company block.

Figure 1. Company block seen from Third Street, winter 1897-98. The store is at far left. (California State Library, California Section, A.A. Martin Collection.)

Phase II: 1898-1901 Expansion (Fig. 2)

As part of an overall expansion of the company's block of buildings, a two-storey addition was built across the rear (east) wall of the store. The roofline on Third Street was altered from a simple gable to a hip, and the doorway on that street was closed. While the Front Street facade of the building remained relatively unchanged, the Third Street buildings - the enlarged store, the retail annex and the new office building - were clad in milled lumber and painted, giving a continuous facade along the street.

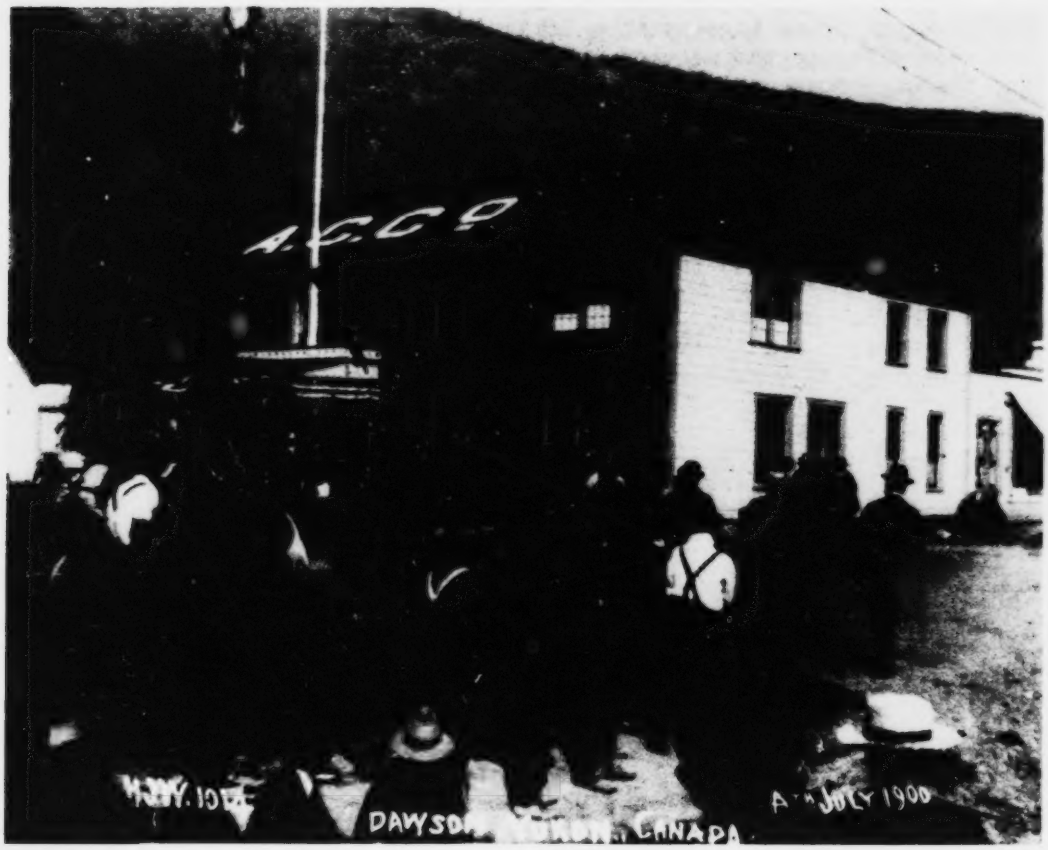


Figure 2. July 4, 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)

Phase III: 1901-21 Consolidation (Fig. 3)

In 1901 the store became headquarters for Dawson's newest and largest trading company. In June of that year the Alaska Commercial Company merged with smaller trading concerns to form the Northern Commercial Company. Lettering on the store's roof changed from "A.C.Co." to "N.C.Co." and certain departments were shuffled to new locations, but the structure itself was unaffected by the merger. The store's gradual orientation to King (formerly Third) Street was confirmed by the opening of new entrances there and the closing of the First Avenue (formerly Front Street) doorway.

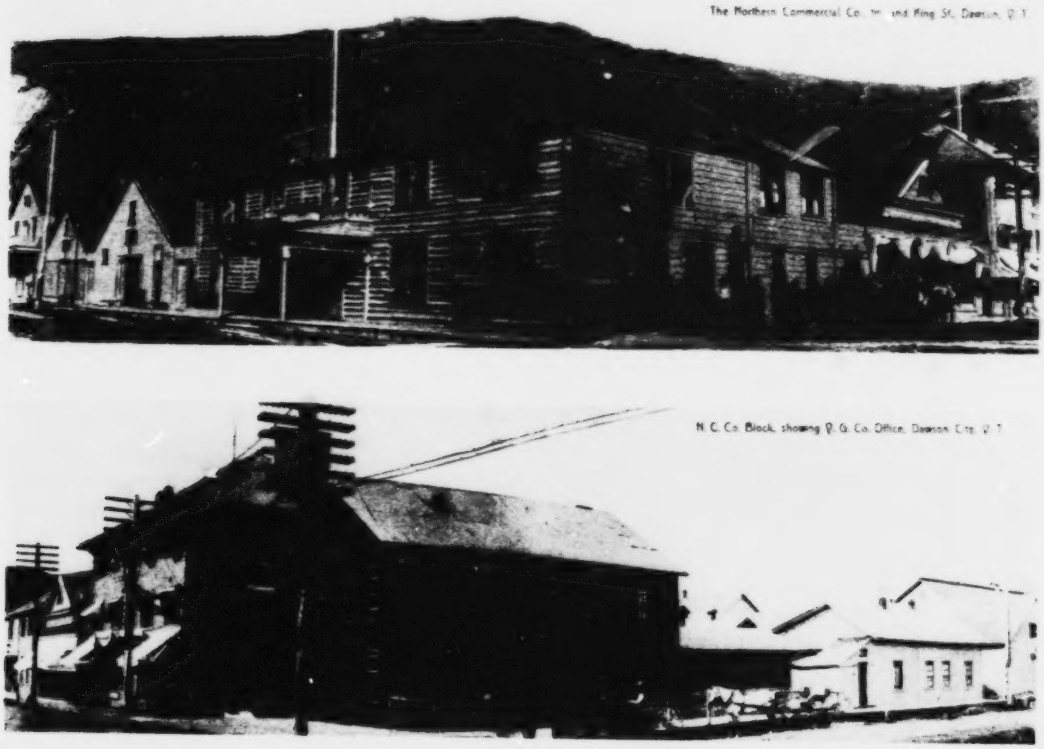


Figure 3. N.C.Co. block ca. 1908. (National Historic Parks and Sites Collection.)

Phase IV: 1921-51 Renewed Confidence (Fig. 4)

Following a company takeover in 1922 by a group of employees incorporated as the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. the store at Dawson was completely overhauled. The new management invested in foundation work, interior alterations and new plate glass display windows along King and onto First. In the late 1930s the company expanded its retail floor space into a new single-storey King Street addition, on the site of the company's office building demolished in 1936. On 10 December 1951 fire destroyed the company's entire block. Only the hall of the Yukon Order of Pioneers (formerly the company's staff house) at King and Second was saved.

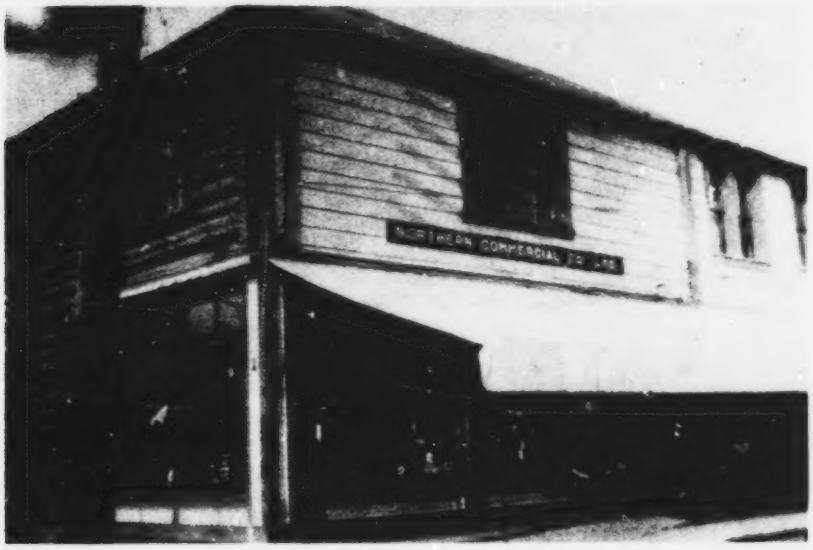


Figure 4. Main entrance on King Street, ca. 1937. (Courtesy Evelyn Dubois.)

PHASE I: 1897-98 CONSTRUCTION

Introduction

The 160-acre Dawson townsite was staked at the mouth of the Klondike River shortly after the discovery of gold in August 1896.[1] While the Alaska Commercial Company (A.C.Co.) did not begin construction of its post there until spring, a block of land was purchased over the winter, possibly even before Dominion Land Surveyor William Ogilvie carried out the initial survey of the townsite in Janaury 1897.[2] The company's property, block C, was centrally located on Dawson's waterfront. It ran 200 ft along the 66-ft-wide Front Street, the main waterfront thoroughfare, and 210 ft back from the river along Third (later King) Street, which would become a major crosstown corridor.

On 2 June 1897 the A.C.Co.'s steamer Bella, the first of the river steamers to reach the gold camp that season, landed 450 tons of freight at Dawson,[3] then only a handful of cabins serving a population of some 1500 seasoned miners from the older camps of Forty Mile and Circle City.[4] Construction on the company's property began immediately, under the supervision of Leroy Napoleon McQuesten.[5] For over 20 years a prospector, river trader and commissioned agent for the company, McQuesten had erected stores in Forty Mile in 1887 and in Circle City in 1893. The company's requirements in Dawson were as they had been at these previous posts: first, simple structures in which to store the company's entire stock as it arrived over the shipping season; secondly, an ample store building not just to provide retail space, but to house the company's offices. Here miners would order yearly outfits, arrange for their pickup or delivery, and weigh in their payments of gold dust with the cashier for storage in the company vault. Thirdly, the company required, in addition to its storage and office facilities, living quarters for its management and staff, for Dawson was not a family town in 1897; company men slept and messed in company quarters. In essence, however, a trading company performed the functions of shipper, wholesale supplier and banker; it depended primarily on steamers, warehouses, and a vault.

Construction Sequence

In June 1897 there was one sawmill in operation at Dawson; Joe Ladue had dismantled his Sixtymile (Ogilvie) operation and floated it downstream to his new townsite. The A.C.Co. monopolized Ladue's sawmill throughout June in order to produce the milled lumber it required for

the construction of its four main buildings.[6] Of highest priority, and constructed first, were the company's warehouses. Two were built in 1897. The first was 40 ft wide and L-shaped, abutting both Front and Third streets. The second, to the north of the L-shaped warehouse, was 30 ft wide on Front Street, running at least the depth of a single lot (100 ft).[7] These warehouses were framed in local spruce (Fig. 5) and either sheathed in wood on the exterior, or clad in corrugated galvanized metal; the latter was preferred for its supposed fireproof qualities.

It was probably not until 1897 that construction of the company's store was undertaken at the southwest corner of the block in the "L" of the first warehouse. During construction the company did business out of temporary quarters, Ladue's cabin and a warehouse, both situated just south of the company's construction site.[8] At the same time work was carried out on staff quarters, a two-storeyed gable-roofed log building at the southeast corner of the company's block, and on the manager's cabin to the north of that building. By 1 October 1897, just as the first wave of gold-crazed adventurers reached Dawson from the south, construction on the company's post was complete. The original investment in the Dawson property was reported at $250,000, the A.C.Co.'s largest stake in a placer camp to that date.[9]

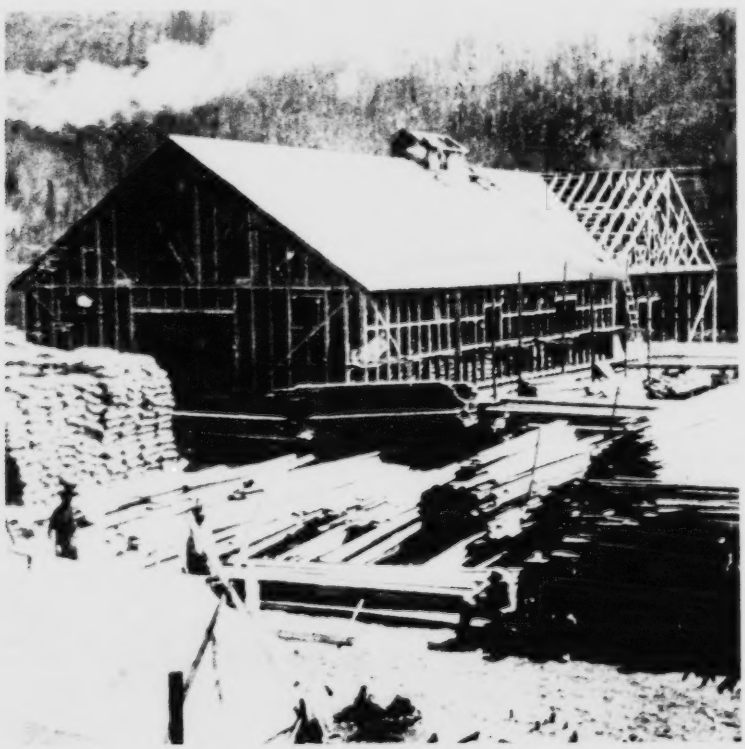


Figure 5. Company supply houses being built, Dawson, 1897. (Alaska Historical Library, 753-4, No. 107.)

The Store

The A.C.Co. store in Dawson was constructed of wood, a decision imposed by soil and climate conditions as well as by the ready availability of the material. It is highly unlikely that for structural work anything other than local spruce was used. While Dawson contractors eventually preferred imported woods for finishing work, it is questionable whether the company could have procured building materials in any quantity to arrive at Dawson on the first steamers of 1897. More to the point, local wood was plentiful at this date, and entirely suitable for the company's purposes. In 1895 for instance, the banks and islands of the Yukon River between Forty Mile and the Klondike River were logged for spruce, which, it was reported, was available in lengths from 16 ft to 35 ft, and in widths 7 to 10 inches across the smaller end.[10]

That the company's store and staff quarters were constructed primarily of log, while its warehouses were of milled lumber followed a tradition of Yukon River post construction carried on in the 1890s by both the A.C.Co. at Circle City (Fig. 6) and the North American Transportation and Trading Company (N.A.T.T.Co.) at Ft. Cudahy (Forty Mile). Presumably, logs provided the warmth necessary for offices and living quarters, while the lighter frame, when clad in metal, provided a surface considered more fireproof - a prime concern in northern warehouses. It seems, however, that only the foundation and walls of the Dawson store were of log; the rest of the building's frame - its roof structure and joists - may well have been of milled lumber.

Figure 6. Company store at Circle City. (Jeremiah Lynch, Three Years in the Klondike [London: Edward Arnold, 1904].)

Because the building itself has been destroyed, because no construction records or plans have come to light (or, in the case of plans, are likely to have existed) and because at the time of writing no archaeological investigation had been undertaken on the site, the measurements of the structure are accessible to us only from contemporary references and by investigation of existing photographs. Tappan Adney, a New York journalist, observed in 1897 that the store measured 80 ft by 40 ft,[11] dimensions confirmed though not substantiated in Flag Over the North, the company's official history by L.D. Kitchener.[12] It is not clear, however, whether these dimensions referred to the main building alone, or included the addition on the east side of the store, an annex of unknown depth, but original to the building. In 1899 a newspaper article in the Yukon Sun described the company's warehouses. While it did not record the store's dimensions, the given size of the L-shaped warehouse implied that the store building and its annex would very likely have measured 80 ft by 40 ft.[13]

Unfortunately, careful investigation of a substantial number of photographs does not confirm these dimensions, rather suggests that the proportions of the store building proper were very likely 80 ft by 32 ft, and that the annex added a further 18 ft to the south end wall, producing overall dimensions of 80 ft by 50 ft.[14] One is perhaps slightly more inclined to dispute the written record when, as in this case, both the primary informants were newspaper reporters for whom the collection of technical data was not an end in itself.

The store building was positioned on the lot so that it faced the river along its length. The double windows in each bay and the central double door gave the store a considerably more imposing riverfront facade than that of the rival N.A.T.T.Co., whose store of similar dimensions was set perpendicular to the riverbank. In fact, the orientation of the A.C.Co. store to the Yukon River was partly symbolic. As long as the company did a traditional outfitting business the store's functional orientation was towards the warehouses and delivery court area at the centre of the company block and to Third Street and the trail to the creeks.

Elements of Construction

Foundations

Unlike many of the boom-town structures hastily erected in Dawson at the height of the rush, the A.C.Co. store had the benefit of veteran builders experienced in northern building conditions. Certainly the store's builders were no strangers to the problems posed by permafrost. The foundation system which they used was, and for years remained, a traditional response to the problem. Trenches were dug to a depth greater than that of the active soil layer, and in them sleepers were laid. The sleepers supported posts and in turn the sills of the structure itself. "Such foundations" it was thought, "could never settle."[15] While time-honoured, the solution was imperfect; within seven years of construction major foundation repairs were required.

Actual details of the store's foundations, like so much of its construction, have not come to light. In the case of foundation methods, some useful comparative material is available. In 1899 the resident architect in Dawson for the federal Department of Public Works reported on foundation problems in that community, having observed firsthand the practices of the trading companies there. In 1902, when the Alaska (then the Northern) Commercial Company itself planned some new construction, the local press reported on the specifications for foundations. These two reports do not enable us to draw conclusions about actual practices in 1897, but they do provide a general background about post and sill construction methods in that period.

In 1899 the Department of Public Works' resident architect T.W. Fuller reported the permafrost table in Dawson at a depth of 18 inches,[16] and presumably considered it to be even and continuous at that depth. In response to the data, and after having closely examined all the buildings of the big companies in Dawson, Fuller laid his first foundations at a depth of 4 ft. When these proved unsatisfactory, he increased the depth to 5 ft in subsequent structures. In 1902 the Northern Commercial Company planned to proceed with foundations at 4 ft, but was prepared to go a further 18 inches if necessary.[17] It does appear that before 1900 at least, foundations at 4 ft were not uncommon.

In its 1902 specifications the company called for trenches 8 ft apart, then mud sills 12 inches by 4 inches in long lengths, laid on a 1-inch bed of sawdust. Posts of not less than 10-inch diameter were to be placed at 5-ft centres. The trenches were to be backfilled with 10 inches of sawdust, then earth, rammed down to ground level. Again, to what extent these specifications shed light on earlier construction is open to question.

Figure 7 shows foundation work underway on the company's L-shaped warehouse. Lines of posts are in place, and the sawdust backfilling is in process. At what distance the posts are centred is difficult to estimate. T.W. Fuller's brief report on his examination of company structures and his conversations with their builders raise a significant problem about centreing:

> all those buildings where the pickets have been at 4:00" centres or over have moved more or less, caused I fancy by an uneven bearing, for one picket may rest over ice, while the next one may be on frozen muck.[18]

The spacing of sleepers and posts may have varied in that section of the store's foundation which carried the vault. According to reports the steel vault and its masonry casing measured 16 ft by 14 ft and weighed 150 tons.[19] It is quite possible that the vault was enclosed in the single-storey annex on the east side of the building, and that a different spacing of sleepers and posts applied there.

When the company undertook major foundation repaires in 1904, newspaper reports implied that, unlike Fuller's Administration Building constructed in 1901, the original company store had no circulating space between ground floor and ground level.[20] Knowledge of permafrost and relevant construction techniques appear to have evolved in Dawson between 1897 and 1901.

Figure 7. Alaska Comercial Company's warehouse in course of erection at Dawson, July, 1897. (William Ogilvie, Early Days on the Yukon and the Story of its Gold Finds [Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbott, 1913].)

Frame

Structurally speaking, the A.C.Co. store at Dawson presents something of a hybrid form. Its logs, laid horizontally, were notched at the corners, as was commonly the case in log cabin construction in the Yukon River valley. The store's side walls, however, appear to have been constructed using a "Red River framing" method, that is to say, logs were tenoned into mortised uprights placed at regular intervals along the walls. These uprights were themselves tenoned into the upper plate and lower sill.

In its purest form (whereby corners were mortised and tenoned rather than notched) Red River framing was traditionally used by the Hudson's Bay Company, and in fact appeared at Fort Yukon in the late 1840s.[21] More recent builders of large log structures in the Yukon made use of both forms; the A.C.Co. store at Circle City was constructed of logs notched at the corners; the N.A.T.T.Co. at Fort Cudahy appears to have made exclusive use of uprights and log infill.

Nor was the combination of forms used in the Dawson stores of both the A.C.Co. and the N.A.T.T.Co. without precedent in the Yukon; the guardhouse erected at Fort Constantine by the North West Mounted Police in 1895 was constructed using both mortised uprights and lapped corners.[22]

The logs used in the A.C.Co.'s Dawson store were most probably native spruce. Unlike those used in the N.A.T.T.Co. store in the next block, the A.C.Co.'s logs were not squared; instead they were peeled and flattened only on two, possibly three, sides. The ends were squared and locked or keyed into place at the corners with a slight overhang or extension. No splicing or intermediate framing is evident in the building's end walls (Figs. 8 and 10): clearly some logs were available in useable lengths of over 30 ft. Problematic were the 80-ft side walls, and it was there that the builders turned to an alternative system. The west side of the building (and, one presumes, the east as well) was framed in 5 bays, defined by uprights placed at what appear to be 16-ft intervals. Photographs clearly show that logs did not run continuously from one bay to the next. By tenoning horizontal logs into a series of mortised uprights, the builders could make efficient use of the shorter lengths imposed on them by local timber.

The mortised uprights did not run the full height of the walls, rather each storey was treated separately. Photographs indicate that four log courses did run the full length of the building: the uppermost course, two courses at storey height, and (less clearly visible) a sill course. Into these members the uprights would have been tenoned. It is doubtful that any single log ran the full length of the building. Certainly splicing is visible in both the courses at storey height (Figs. 28 and 35).

Figure 8. Dawson, November 17, 1897. (California State Library, California Section, A.A. Martin Collection.)

Later interior photographs indicate an original centre beam, which appears to have run the full length of the building between the ground and second floors. Figure 23 shows quite clearly that the beam was constructed of laminated planks rather than a single member. Exterior photographs give no evidence whatsoever that the beam ran through the end walls, rather the appearance in Figure 37 of square nuts and washers or cups regularly spaced along the beam indicates that a suspension rod system was in use. How the suspension rods were fixed at their upper end and how the suspended beam was seated in the end wall are entirely unclear.

Similarly open to conjecture is the building's joist pattern. Quite possibly the second floor joists ran half the width of the building and were carried by the centre beam. How these joists were seated at the outside walls is unknown. Once again, however, photographs make it quite clear that joists were not carried through the logs walls. Like the beam, the joists were quite likely of milled planks.

The building's roof frame is obscured from analysis. Logs at the gable ends were built up to the ridge, but how these logs were pinned, reinforced or framed to the roof members is not known. In McQuesten's store at Circle City log purloins were set into the logs of the gable ends (Fig. 6), but there is no evidence of such purloins on the Dawson building. Nor was the roof of the Dawson store sod covered, as the Circle City store had been, but rather was sheathed in corrugated metal. Company construction at Dawson was in all respects more refined than it had been four years previously.

Doors and Windows

Figure 9 offers a rare view of the store under construction. Window frames are in place but have not yet received their glazed sashes. Other views, both interior and exterior, indicate that door and window trim were of the simplest kind. Certainly the closeup of the Front Street doorway offered in Figure 22 reveals a door frame that could have been planed at the mill at Dawson in 1897. Sash work, on the other hand, as well as the doors themselves, were almost certainly imported.

The doorway at the south end of the store is well documented in Figures 10 and 11. The doors, 6 panes of glass over 3 (possibly 4) fielded panels, opened inwards, and were surmounted by a transom. Figure 14 suggests that the Front Street doors were identical. The door at the north end of the building was lower than the other two, and had neither glass nor transom.

The A.C.Co. made use of an exceptional amount of glass in its store; certainly more than did the N.A.T.T.Co. in the next block, whose side walls, though comparable in length to those of the A.C.Co. store, presented a virtually unbroken log surface; and certainly more than the builders of traditional log structures in Dawson, for whom warmth was infinitely more important than a light-filled interior.

Figure 9. Store under construction. (Harry Fenn, The Century Magazine, March, 1898.)

Figure 10. Third Street doorway, winter 1897-98. (California State Library, California Section, A.A. Martin Collection.)

The tall double windows on the ground floor may have been of the casement type. The double windows on the second floor contained double hung sashes, 6 panes over 6. They appear identical to those used in the company's staff quarters, and in McQuesten's store at Circle City.

Figure 11. The doorway onto Third Street, 1898. (Mary E. Hitchcock, Two Women in the Klondike: The Story of a Journey to the Gold-Fields of Alaska [New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899].)

Layout

A trading company had obvious requirements for a large amount of clear ground floor space in which to transact its business. Suspension rods through the main beam did allow the A.C.Co. a completely open ground floor, as shown in Figures 23 and 37. The north end of the store, lined with shelves on three sides, provided space for groceries and general stocks in 1901, 1909 and, quite likely, in 1897. A row of offices[23] formed by wooden counters and high glass partitions (visible in Figs. 24, 25 and 37) ran along the east wall of the building and probably dominated the south half of the ground floor.

A major feature of the floor plan must surely have been the company's vault, a steel box 14 ft by 12 ft and 9 ft in height, completely encased in a 2-ft masonry envelope. One report indicates that the vault was "built in" to the offices,[24] another found it "in

connection" with them.[25] Certainly the cashier, at the northernmost wicket of the offices, would have had direct access to it. Otherwise no mention is made of the vault's location. Most likely the vault was housed in the annex of the store, accessible from the offices by a doorway through the east wall of the main building. In fact, the letters "SAFE.DE"[POSIT] are visible in a clear print of Figure 25 where they appear on a door casing in the extreme right background of the photograph.

There were at least two public entrances to the store, one off each of the main thoroughfares. Interior photographs indicate a third door at the north end of the building, quite possibly an exit from the store to the courtyard and warehouse area. Public access to the second floor of the building was probably gained from the Third Street door. Stairs are not visible in any known interior shots; in fact, evidence of any kind about the location of the stairway is thin indeed. The southeast corner of the building is a probable location.

The second floor of the building was originally used as office space, some for company purposes and some rented out. A block and tackle arrangement visible in Figure 12 suggests the existence of some

Figure 12. Celebration at Dawson of U.S. Naval Victories, 1898. (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

storage space on the second floor in 1898.

How space on this floor was originally partitioned is not known. The fact that Captain Hansen, the company's district superintendent and Dawson manager, held a meeting of 20 Dawson businessmen in his office (probably the one shown in Fig. 13) gives some indication of the size of that room.[26] Of interest in Figure 13 is the partition running from the centre mullion of the double window. Partitions like this may have defined offices across the front of the building.

Not all second floor offices were partitioned to the ceiling. Existing friction between two particular tenants, Canadian Customs Collector Davis and American Consul McCook, was no doubt abetted by their office arrangments in the A.C.Co. building. While their adjacent quarters (McCook's was referred to as a "desk room") had separate doorways, the offices themselves were separated only by a handrail.[27] With sawmills pressed to their limit, accommodations were tight in the summer of 1898; one had to make do with less than adequate quarters.

Figure 13. Interior of Captain Hansen's Office. (Holt-Atherton Pacific Centre for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, W.G.A. Miller Collection.)

Interior Finishes and Fittings

There is very little documentation, either written or photographic, of the store's original finishes and fittings. There is one reference in 1897 to shelves, and one in 1898 to counters.[28] These early fittings may well have been temporary and replaced during the renovations in the fall months of 1898. More likely, however, they are the same fittings photographed in 1900 (Fig.26), and 1901 (Figs. 23, 24 and 25) and described later in "Interior Finishes, Fittings and Mechanical Systems." Almost certainly original to the building were the flooring and ceiling materials visible in these photographs. Both floor and ceiling on the ground floor appear to have been of simple tongue and groove boards. Walls may originally have been sheathed in a similar fashion, although exposed log and wallpaper are other possibilities.

The provenance of wood used in interior work is difficult to determine. As a finishing wood, local spruce had many disadvantages, as outlined by Department of Public Works' architect T.W. Fuller in several of his reports.[29] He found it of inferior quality in terms of strength, hard to get straight in long lengths, apt to be badly sawn, and almost always green. As such it was totally unsuited to finishing work, because of its tendency to twist and shrink. Certainly, any local wood milled in the summer of 1897 would have been unseasoned.

What choice the company had in its materials is not known. It may have imported California redwood, a material commonly used for interior finishing work in Dawson in 1898.[30] It is considerably more likely that the San Francisco-based firm imported redwood for finishing work - if import it did - rather than B.C. fir, which was commonly used at a later date. Whatever specialized commercial fittings were required were almost certainly imported. The steel vault, for example, with its inner steel door and outer door of double thickness secured by Diebold locks and bolts[31] was probably shipped to Dawson along with the building hardware required for construction in 1897.

Figure 13, probably taken of Manager Hansen's office in 1898, gives an indication of interior finishes on the second floor at that time. Despite the application of a bordered wallpaper, the room appears starkly finished. Window trim, like that visible on the exterior, is of the simplest manufacture. Furnishings - a desk, chair and window blind -represent only what was essential. Mention of a "handrail" between the offices of Customs Collector Davis and American Consul McCook is the only other reference to the original appearance of that floor. The fact that even to his most respectable guests McCook served his bourbon in tin cups suggests a somewhat unfinished environment generally on that floor.[32]

Exterior Finishes and Fittings

The store's log facade in 1897 and early 1898 was entirely without ornament. Logs were peeled and left unpainted. The walls were originally chinked with moss, but as settling took place additional chinking or caulking was required. In August 1898 the Klondike Nugget reported scaffolding in place and men at work using mallets and wooden

caulking tools.[33] Door and window trim appear to have been painted in a light colour, while the doors were of a darker finish. The roof, as mentioned in "Frame," was clad in galvanized corrugated iron and possibly painted as well.

In 1897-98 there was no commercial sign on the A.C.Co. store; clearly, none was needed to identify a primary institution and a major landmark. Highly visible instead was a collection of notices on the store's walls. The earliest photgraphs of the building show messages tacked onto the logs around the Third Street doorway (Figs. 8 and 10): acquaintances were sought by new arrivals in town, goods and services were announced to prospective buyers and sellers.[34] Over the winter of 1897-98 two bulletin boards were mounted, one on either side of the Third Street doorway (Fig. 11). The communications role played by the "A.C. corner" in the months before Dawson had a post office, newspaper or telephone service cannot be overestimated. In fact, notice boards were a continuing feature of the corner long after other communication systems were available in Dawson.

Not visible on the store's facade until 1898 was a flagpole. While later photographs show an appropriate display of the Ensign, the Stars and Stripes and the company's red pennant, the pole in 1898 flew only the American Flag (Fig. 14). Even that was not run up by the company, but rather seems to have been the work of the American consul, McCook, whose office was in the building. The flag, and the refusal of the Canadian customs collector, Davis, to do business in a building where it flew, became something of a local cause célèbre. Davis pulled rank. The flag was removed.[35]

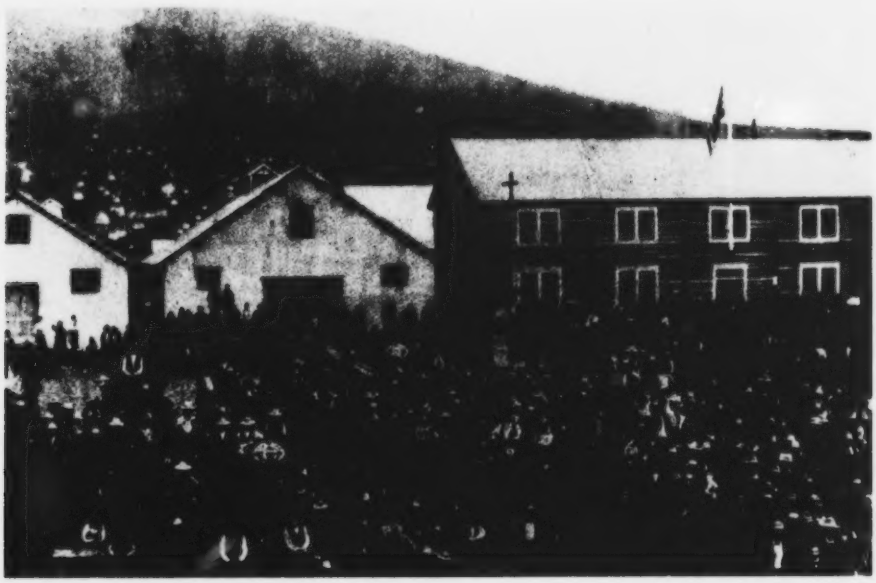


Figure 14. Welcoming a River Steamer in Dawson, 1898. (Mary E. Hitchcock, Two Women in the Klondike: The Story of a Journey to the Gold-Fields of Alaska [New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons].)

Mechanical Systems

One can describe the building's original services very simply, for none of the up-to-date systems subsequently installed - steam heating, electric lighting, running water - were in place in 1897-98.

The building was originally heated by wood-burning stoves. Two metal thimbles still in place in the ground floor ceiling, but no longer in use, are partly visible in photographs of 1901 and 1909 (Figs. 23 and 37). These thimbles appear to have been aligned with the two metal chimney pipes emerging on the east side of the roof ridge.

Original lighting here, as in other Dawson residences and stores of the period, would have been produced by oil lamps and candles. The first reference to the company's own electric light plant does not appear until 1899.[36]

Water was delivered to Dawson buildings as required. Not until 1899 was running water available to Dawson residents, and then not on a year-round basis.[37] No references have been found to the original location of water closets.

Occupancy

In its first year of operation the A.C.Co. store had more in common with its predecessors at Forty Mile and Circle City than it had with the sophisticated Dawson department store that it was to become in 1898. The building provided the community not only with a store, but with banking facilities, offices and social centre as well.

Under the management of J.E. Hansen the company did a traditional outfitting business. Early in the shipping season needs were predicted and orders sent out on the company's fleet of river steamers to St. Michael and ocean-going vessels to San Francisco. During the summer miners came into town to order their outfit at the company's offices, and as soon as cold weather slowed mining activity in September, long lines were reported at the outfits wicket.[38] Some miners paid for their outfits in advance, but many made a down payment in the fall and were carried on credit until spring, when running water allowed them to "clean up" their claims and pay off their accounts, weighing in their gold dust with the company's cashier.

As goods arrived in Dawson between May and October they were transshipped directly from the company's steamers to its warehouses across the street. There they were stored until a complete freeze-up made passable the trails to the creeks. In November 1897 Tappan Adney observed that the A.C.Co. warehouses were full and that the courtyard was busy with people "sledding stuff away from piles marked with their names."[39] Packed sleds could be left in the delivery court under the watchful eyes of the warehouseman until the miner was ready to depart.[40]

The A.C.Co. did not operate a "store" in the traditional retailing sense of the word in 1897. Of the 1354 tons of provisions received that year,[41] most moved directly from the warehouse to the customer. Newcomers to the system observed with some surprise that most cargo was

entirely spoken for before it was landed at the company post.[42] Ultimately, stocks were short in 1897, and the company did an even smaller retail business than it had anticipated. It very much appears that while the company built a substantial post in anticipation of a boom town, it ordered its stocks with less foresight. In November, Adney remarked that there were whole rows of empty shelves where groceries should have been,[43] and that axehandles and sugar were the store's only plentiful commodities. While the "starvation camp" which was predicted that winter did not come to pass, the 7000 or so who wintered in the Klondike district did feel the pinch of shortages, high prices and rationed goods. The A.C.Co. filled its orders in rotation, accepted a police guard at its barricaded warehouses, and in October paid passage out on its last downriver steamer for the less provident miners in the district.[44]

Despite its nearly empty shelves the company store drew customers, those with legitimate transactions as well as those seeking warmth and conversation. "The stores were full of men," Adney reported, "warming themselves by the stoves and appearing to have nothing to do."[45] At the office wickets men worked out their orders, arranged for transportation, made use of the company's postal facilities, and, more significantly, of its vault.

Prior to the arrival of banks in Dawson in 1898 the two trading companies performed an important banking function. It is of interest that a report on repairs to the A.C.Co. store in 1904 looked back on the historic role the company vault had played as a major depository for the Klondike's early wealth.[46] In addition to receiving and storing payments in gold dust for both outfits and retail transactions, the company cashier bought dust outright for cash and credit vouchers, as well as for cheques and money orders drawn on the company's headquarters.[47] By 1898 the A.C.Co. ran its own assay office in one of its courtyard buildings, thus making possible shipments in gold bricks.[48]

The company's vault also provided secure storage for other companies and individuals. Contained in it were 222 safety deposit boxes.[49] Businessmen and government agents deposited regularly with either of the large trading companies, taking advantage of the fact that their vaults were under guard night and day. The gold commissioner for the Department of the Interior reported at the end of 1897 that the department's royalties for that year (over $87,000) had been deposited in the vault of one of the trading companies.[50]

While most of the company's daily transactions appear to have taken place on the ground floor, the second floor of the building was open to business as well. In addition to Hansen's office on that floor, the company rented space in 1898 to the Canadian customs collector, to the American consul and to at least one lawyer.[51] As noted in "Layout" the second floor was not entirely devoted to office space, however; the shortage of appropriate business accommodation in 1897-98 was acute, and the A.C.Co. would have drawn high rents for office quarters in its building. Once its office block was constructed in 1898 the company may have temporarily ceased renting space in its store; it turned over at least part of the second floor to retail space at that time.[52]

Townsite Context

The fact that the A.C.Co. and the N.A.T.T.Co. dominated Yukon trade and shipping in 1897-98 was aptly reflected in their location and physical presence in Dawson. Their two substantial waterfront blocks, side by side, easily overshadowed Dawson's business core of boom-town fronts and canvas roofs (Figs. 15 and 16). The location of the A.C.Co. at the corner of Front and Third streets was especially advantageous because Third Street provided the main route to the creeks, breaking away at the eastern edge of the townsite into a trail over the hill and towards the Klondike River. Indeed, that trail became known as the "A.C. Trail," and pack trains using that route departed from the company block.

By virtue of its two main entrances the company store effectively dominated the corner of Front and Third. Platforms or sidewalks, probably 8 ft wide at first, constructed along both sides of the building, established one of the most important intersections in Dawson, and for many, the usual place of rendez-vous[53] (Fig. 17). Two miners'

Figure 15. Winter 1897-98. A.C.Co. and N.A.T.T.Co. blocks are in the centre of the photograph. (California State Library, California Section, A.A. Martin Collection.)

mass meetings were called there in the fall and winter of 1897: one to discuss proposed changes to federal mining regulations[54] and the other to deal with the implications of an impending starvation winter.[55] And on fine days when a steamer was about to pull in, when a gold-laden pack train arrived from the creeks, or when the Salvation Army started up a meeting, the audience of "miners and idle men" was such that there was not a seat to be found on the platform[56] (Fig. 14).

Figure 16. Dawson, June 1898. To the left of the A.C.Co. block is that of the N.A.T.T.Co. (Public Archives Canada.)

Figure 17. The A.C. corner, 1898. (Edwin Tappan Adney, The Klondike Stampede [Fairfield: Ye Galleon Press, 1968].)

PHASE II: 1898-1901 EXPANSION

Introduction

The profits of 1897 and 1898 launched the company into a period of expansion at its Dawson post. The fall months of 1898 brought a prolonged spell of mild weather and allowed the A.C.Co. a welcome breathing space - between the hectic shipping season and total freeze-up - in which to carry out new construction. A two-storey addition to the store, built on the site of the small annex at the building's east wall, opened up a considerable amount of retail floor space. The construction of an office block on the company property relieved the pressure of accommodation on the store's second floor which in turn released additional display space there. A year later, the Third Street portion of the L-shaped warehouse was also converted to retail space. To accommodate increased trade - and by extension, storage - five new warehouses were built in 1898: one at the north end of the company block on Front Street, and other four at the eastern outskirts of the townsite, between what were to become Fifth and Sixth avenues (Fig. 18). Time has revealed the wisdom of separating warehouses from Dawson's flammable core. The company's Fifth Avenue warehouses have survived fire and flood; the waterfront warehouse district has not.

As the trading company expanded between 1898 and 1901 it became more diverse in its specialities. Of course, shipping, outfitting, storage, safe deposit and the purchase of gold dust all remained key transactions between the company and the mining community. But Dawson itself was no longer simply a mining camp; it was becoming an urban community of increasing sophistication. To relfect its changing market the A.C.Co. opened new showrooms in 1898 for ladies' and gentlemen's furnishings, dry goods and household items. Its stocks in dress goods, one admiring journalist reported, were available in an assortment equal to any shown in the avenues of New York, Chicago or San Francisco.[1] Such was the rhetoric of the business community of the day: confident, yet anxious to assure one another that Dawson was not just a flash in the pan, but a city coming of age.

The community's transition from a riverfront mining camp to an up-to-date commercial centre was perfectly paralleled in the physical evolution of the company block. Early in 1898, the company's property was still basically a collection of warehouses and outbuildings dominated by the store at the corner. This assortment of structures in log, lumber and metal was expanded in 1898 and enclosed in 1900 by continuous facades on two sides. From its corner position the store still dominated the block, but by 1901 it clearly formed part of a large and cohesive commercial complex.

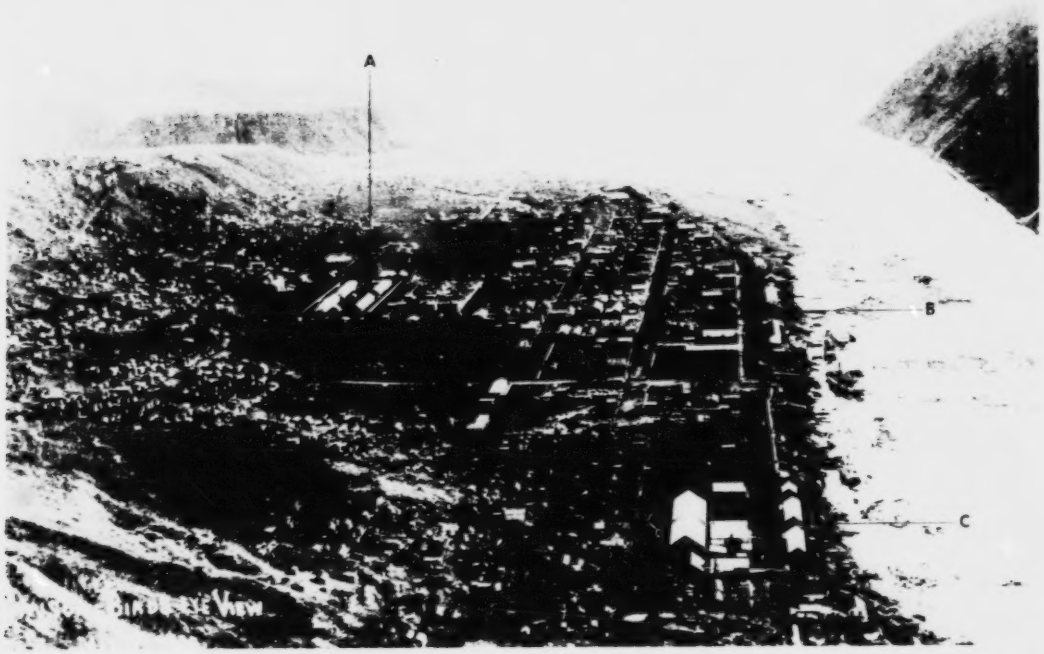


Figure 18. "Dawson - Bird's-eye view May 5, 1900." (Yukon Archives No. 3740, MacBride Museum Collection.)
The company's Fifth Avenue warehouses are visible at "A" and the main company block at "B." The warehouse complex at "C" was acquired by the company in 1901.

Structural Evolution

Exterior Changes to the Store

The addition made to the A.C.Co.'s Dawson store in 1898 and the conversion of part of a warehouse to a retail annex in 1899 established an entirely new profile on Third Street, one which defined the store's appearance there until 1922.

In the fall of 1898 the single-storey annex on the store's east wall was used as a base for a two-storey addition running the full length of the building. On the south face of the enlarged building a hipped roof replaced the original gable end (Fig. 19); at the opposite end the roofline was simply raised at the back to accommodate the addition (Fig. 20). How the roofline was worked out from one end of the addition to the other is not entirely clear, especially as the building's east exposure, enclosed by the L-shaped warehouse, seems to have defied photography over the years. One 1900 panorama (Fig. 18) suggests that the raised roofline ran most of the length of the addition, and that the hip was something of a facade on the south end. While there is no photographic evidence of the store's new east wall, it very much appears

Figure 19. The Alaska Commercial Company Building, 1899. (Dawson City Museum and Historical Society Collection.)

Figure 20. July 5, 1900. (Public Archives Canada.)

from photographs of the southeast corner that new second storey construction on the Third Street facade was continued in log. As lumber was still at a premium in 1898 it is likely that materials already on site - logs from elsewhere in the building, for example - were reused wherever possible. Making use of the existing foundation and frame of a single-storeyed structure to produce a two-storey building was common practice in Dawson during the lumber shortage.[2]

The ground floor windows of the original annex were maintained, and two new single windows were added on the second floor of the addition's south wall. At the same time, it appears, the Third Street doorway to the main store was closed and replaced with a single window. A second double window was installed the following year just east of the old doorway. For a period of time in 1899, there was no access to the store from Third Street.

In 1899 the Third Street portion of the L-shaped warehouse was converted into retail space as additional sales and display room.[3] The space seems to have been annexed to the main store by means of a ground floor link of unknown depth built flush with the facade of the two structures (Fig. 2). The simple warehouse end of the new annex was completely transformed by a milled facade (Fig. 21) which opened up

Figure 21. A.C.Co. office building and portion of converted warehouse, January, 1900. (Captain T.G. Fuller Collection.)

into large display windows and a central recessed doorway. That doorway was, until 1901, the store's only Third Street entrance.[4]

The construction work of 1898 and 1899 had little effect on the building's Front Street facade. The most visible change was the addition of a porch over the central doorway. It first appears in photographs taken in 1899 (Figs. 22 and 19), but the work may have been done in November of the previous year. At that time the original doors on Front Street were replaced with "glass storm doors,"[5] which, as seen in Figure 22, contained a single pane of glass rather than the six panes in the original doors.

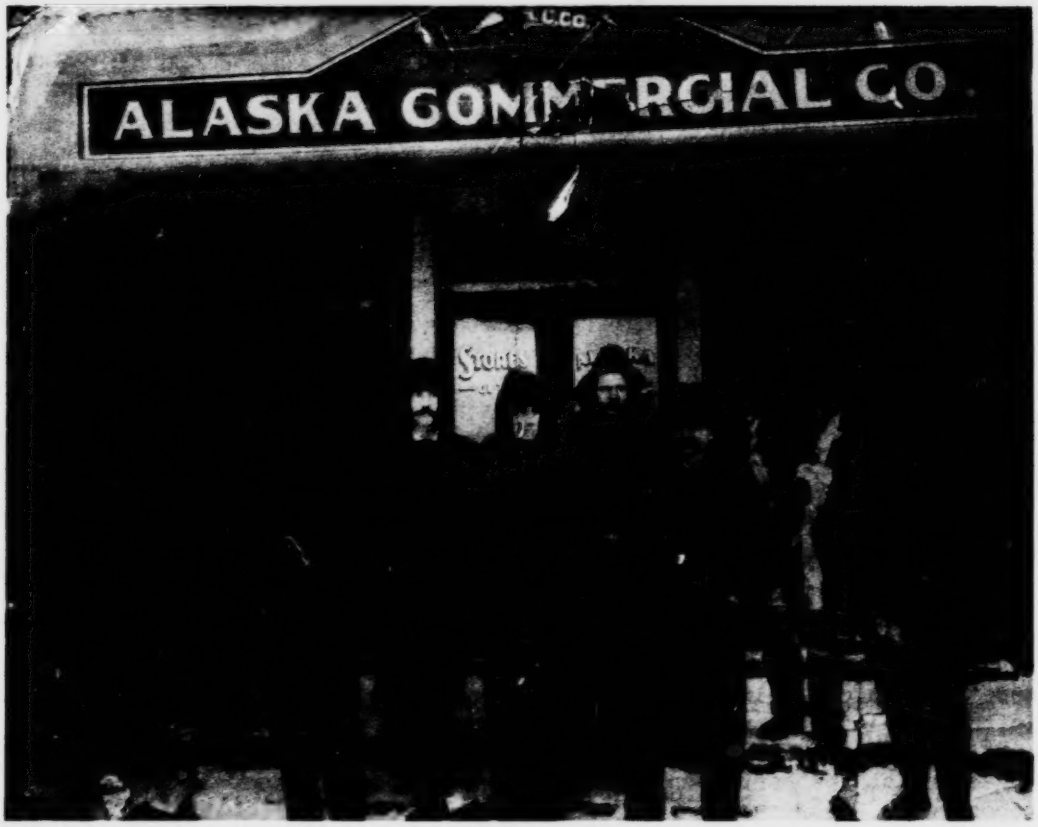


Figure 22. A.C.Co. employees, 1898. (Holt-Atherton Pacific Centre for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, W.G.A. Miller Collection.)

Changes Elsewhere on the Block

Office Building. The largest structure erected by the company in 1898 was the office building situated on Third Street between the L-shaped warehouse and the staff quarters (Fig. 21). Three full stories in height and hip-roofed, the building was sheathed completely in milled lumber. Three doors led from the street to ground floor offices, and, likely in the case of the central doorway, to the upper floors as well.

Later photographs indicate a two-storey annex at the rear of the office building (Fig. 18 [1900] and Fig. 30 [1901]). Its purpose and date of construction are unknown.

Staff Quarters. The construction of the offce building in 1898 required the demolition of the single-storey annex at the west side of the staff house. This was replaced by a similar addition at the rear (north) of the building.

Warehouses. In July 1898 the company added a third warehouse to the two already situated on Front Street.[6] The third and most northerly structure was, like the warehouse next to it, 30 ft wide and 210 ft long - the full depth of the block.[7] Within three months of construction the new warehouse was converted to an engine house and quarters for Dawson's first fire brigade. The work necessary to make the structure "comfortable" suggests that the company had originally constructed its warehouses (or this one, at least) by simply applying corrugated iron directly to the studs. For their own purposes the firemen constructed interior walls, laid a ceiling and filled the spaces between the boards and the corrugated metal with sawdust.[8]

In the late summer and fall of 1898 four more warehouses were constructed at the east end of the townsite on Third Street. The compound there included four warehouses, each 35 ft by 195 ft, staff quarters and a building to house the company's police detachment.[9] The warehouses were connected to the main block and wharves by a horse-drawn tramway. Photographs indicate that tracks were laid down the south side of Third Street and the west side of Second Avenue. Their point of entry to the company block is not known.

Layout

In October 1898 the Klondike Nugget conducted for its readers an armchair tour of the newly enlarged A.C.Co. store.[10] With the assistance of contemporary photographs, one can gain from that report some indication - although it is far from clear - of the store's layout in this period. It seems very likely that the ground floor configuration visible in 1901 photographs (Figs. 23, 24 and 25), i.e. groceries at the north end and offices at the south, was the layout reported in 1898.

The reporter first described the general offices on the ground floor, but he did not indicate their extent. By November 1898 Manager Hansen's office was removed from the second to the ground floor, and as this was done with the added convenience of patrons[11] in mind, his office was very likely placed in the vicinity of the general offices. The conversion of the Third Street doorway to a window, the addition of a second window in the wall (ca. 1900) and the visibility of a partition between the two (Fig.2) suggest the southwest corner to have been a reasonable location for one or more such private offices.

The Nugget reporter found the groceries next to the offices, as they clearly were in 1901 (Fig. 24). Adjacent to those groceries was the hardware, china and glassware department. In Figure 37 (1909) both hardware and some crockery are visible along the front wall of the

Figure 23. Moosehide Indians in the retail grocery store, A.C.Co., 24 May, 1901. (Holt-Atherton Pacific Centre for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton California, W.G.A. Miller Collection.)

store. That may have been the location of those goods in this earlier period as well.

Figures 24, 25 and 37 show the east wall of the main building open at its central bay. An arch supported by simple columns led from the original store to new floor space. That may have been the location of the recently added clock and drugs department referred to in the Nugget. The article does not locate the ladies' furnishings, dry goods and housekeeping department except to place them in space "now afforded by the opening of the new show rooms." It too may have been on the ground floor of the addition. A newspaper article of November 1898 sheds further light on the disposition of space beyond the archway. it indicates that the newly installed storm doors on the Front Street entrance permitted direct entrance to the furnishings and dry goods departments.[12] Discontinuous ceiling finish visible in Figure 37 suggests that the storm doors may have at one time opened into a small vestibule partitioned off from the ground floor. What kind of direct

access to other departments that would have allowed is not at all clear. What it probably did was orient the customer on arrival towards the central archway and through it to dry goods and furnishings in the new display space at the rear of the store. The directional sign in Figure 24 ([DRY GO]ODS) suggests the same thing, although by this time (1901) the dry goods and furnishings departments may have taken up quarters in the Third Street annex.

What effect the closing of the Third Street doorway and the installation of a private office downstairs had on the location of the stairway to the second floor is not known. The Nugget's tour of the building simply reported that the second floor was devoted in part to gentlemen's furnishings. Figure 20 taken in 1900 shows that there was still a freight entrance at the north end of the second floor.

Interior Finishes, Fittings and Mechanical Systems

Photographic documentation of the store's interior in this period is good, although narrow in the perspective it offers. All four

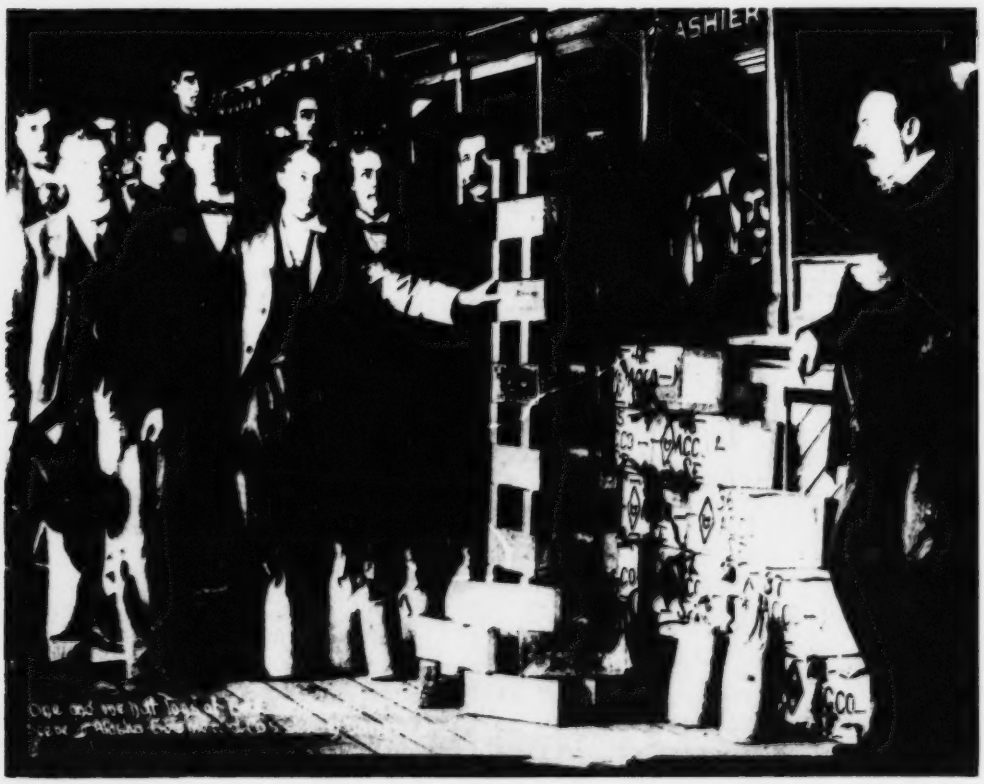


Figure 24. "One and one half tons of Gold Bricks and Dust. Scene in Alaska Commercial Co.'s store in Dawson June 9, 1901." (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

Figure 25. "1 1/2 tons of Klondyke gold. Scene in Alaska Commercial Co.'s store in Dawson, June 9, 1901." (Charles Bunnell Collection, Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 58-1026-1479.)

photographs available (Figs. 23, 24, 25 and 26) show the grocery and office areas of the ground floor in 1900 and 1901. One cannot be sure to what extent the photographed interior reflected the store's original finishes as opposed to subsequent applications. As discussed in "Interior Finishes and Fittings," the tongue and groove boards on floor and ceiling are very likely original fabric. The flooring appears relatively unfinished, although it may simply have been well worn by 1901. There is enough reflection off the ceiling in Figure 23 to suggest a varnish of some kind.

Wall finishes shown in Figure 23 are difficult to analyse, obscured as they are by shelves and merchandise. The visible patches of surface appear to be of a smooth material rather than of boards. As no lath and plaster was undertaken in Dawson in this period, a plain wallpaper applied to muslin stretched onto the wall was a common interior finish in both businesses and residences.[13] Wallpaper is certainly visible elsewhere in this building, both upstairs (Fig. 13 as referred to in "Interior Finishes and Fittings") as well as in the office area of the ground floor (Figs. 25 and 26). Beyond saying that the patterns visible

in these photographs were popular in this period, it is difficult to date such fragments within the narrow range (1897-1901) we are discussing here.[14]

Likewise, it is difficult to date the installations of the ground floor fittings visible in these photographs. The shelving seems relatively simple, with some moulding at the upper rim. More elaborate mouldings were used on counters, display cases and office partitions. These ground floor offices seem to have been formed by a unit or units of partitions open at the top. Counters of panelled framing were surmounted by glazed partitions and open wickets, each wicket providing a specific service: outfits, transportation, mail and cashier.[15] The V-joint boards, moulding and glass visible in Figure 26 very likely represent the interior of a portion of the general office area.

The electric lights and, quite likely the office telephone visible

Figure 26. W.G.A. Miller in office of A.C.Co., September 12, 1900. (Holt-Atherton Pacific Centre for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, W.G.A. Miller Collection.)

in these photographs, were added to the store in this period. By the winter of 1899-1900 the Dawson Electric Light and Power Company Ltd. had wired the town's commercial core for street and interior lighting.[16] At that time, however, the A.C.Co. was not one of its customers. By December 1899 the trading company powered its own electric dynamo from the northeast corner of the block.[17]

Telephone equipment arrived in Dawson in 1898.[18] While the A.C.Co. may have been one of the early customers of the Yukon Telephone and Telegraph Syndicate, indications are that service between Dawson and the creeks was unreliable before 1900.[19] The telephone visible in Figure 26 was probably at that time (September 1900) one of several in the store.

The plant which operated the A.C.Co.'s dynamo in 1899 also made steam heat available to company buildings. There is no evidence of steam heating pipes in any of the interior shots of this period; in fact, the only indication that conversion from wood stoves to steam heat might have taken place appears in Figure 23: a thimble is visible where stove pipes have been removed.

A third facility to which the store had access in 1899 was running water. Pipes were laid by September of that year, one branch of them terminating at a pump house on the A.C.Co. block.[20] It seems doubtful from contemporary newspaper reports that water was pumped directly into businesses and residences. Instead, users drew their water from several hydrants on the route. Attempts were made, unsuccessfully, to keep the water running throughout the winter.[21] In 1900 the system was taken over by the Dawson City Water and Power Company Ltd., which offered direct connections, at least in the summer months, to buildings in the downtown core.[22] That company was also empowered to construct and maintain a sewage system as well. How or if it operated is unknown. The only direct reference to the store's sanitary arrangements in this period indicates that ladies' lavatories were installed in the new clothing department in 1898.[23]

Exterior Finishes and Fittings

In the fall of 1899 the store's Third Street facade, from the corner of Front Street to the east wall of the Third Street annex, was clad in milled lumber.[24] At the same time a new window was cut into the south wall of the main store and the ground floor windows of the addition were increased in height to align them with existing window heads.

In May of 1900 the company opened the construction season with a liberal application of paint to their stores, office buildings and warehouses.[25] The grays and drabs selected were reported to "harmonize with nice effect," and gave the company's property a consistent facade for over 150 ft along Third Street. It was generally antcipated that the store's log facade on Front Street would be painted as well, but that was not the case. The logs were simply recaulked (Fig. 27). Figure 2 shows that roofs were painted in a dark tone, and the "A.C.Co." was painted in large letters on the slope overlooking the waterfront. The flagpole was maintained and a snow guard added to the roof.

Figure 27. Company float, 24 May 1901. (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

The Yukon Territory passed a local ordinance in 1899 requiring 8-ft sidewalks on Front Street and 4-ft sidewalks elsewhere.[26] There is every indication that the company's original sidewalks already complied with these widths, but when the ordinance was amended in 1900 to require 12-ft sidewalks on Front Street and 8-ft elsewhere (both 2 in. thick) new construction was necessary.[27] Moreover, to accommodate the wider sidewalks on Front Street it appears that the store's porch was altered as well, by the addition of a box or balcony-like structure at the rear of the original porch roof (compare the original porch in Fig. 19, 1899 with the deeper porch in Fig. 20, 1900).

By 1900 the store carried a significant amount of signage: lettering on the store roof, on the friezes of the porch, and over the doors of the warehouses. Figures 22 and 28 suggest that lettering on the glass in the Front Street doors read in part: "STORES OF THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY" and that a sign to the right of those doors advertised: "ALASKA COMMERCIAL CO. SAFE DEPOSIT VAULT." During the construction of 1898-99 the bulletin boards were removed from the Third Street wall and affixed to the Front Street wall of the store.

After 1899 utility poles, wires and street lamps appeared along both streets, although the lamps are only visible in photographs of 1899 and early 1900 (Figs. 29 and 21).

National celebrations, whether the Queen's Birthday (Fig. 27) or Fourth of July (Fig. 28), called for a full display of flags, banners, bunting and evergreens affixed to the walls of the store. Whatever the holiday, A.C.Co. decorations emphasized the company's American heritage.

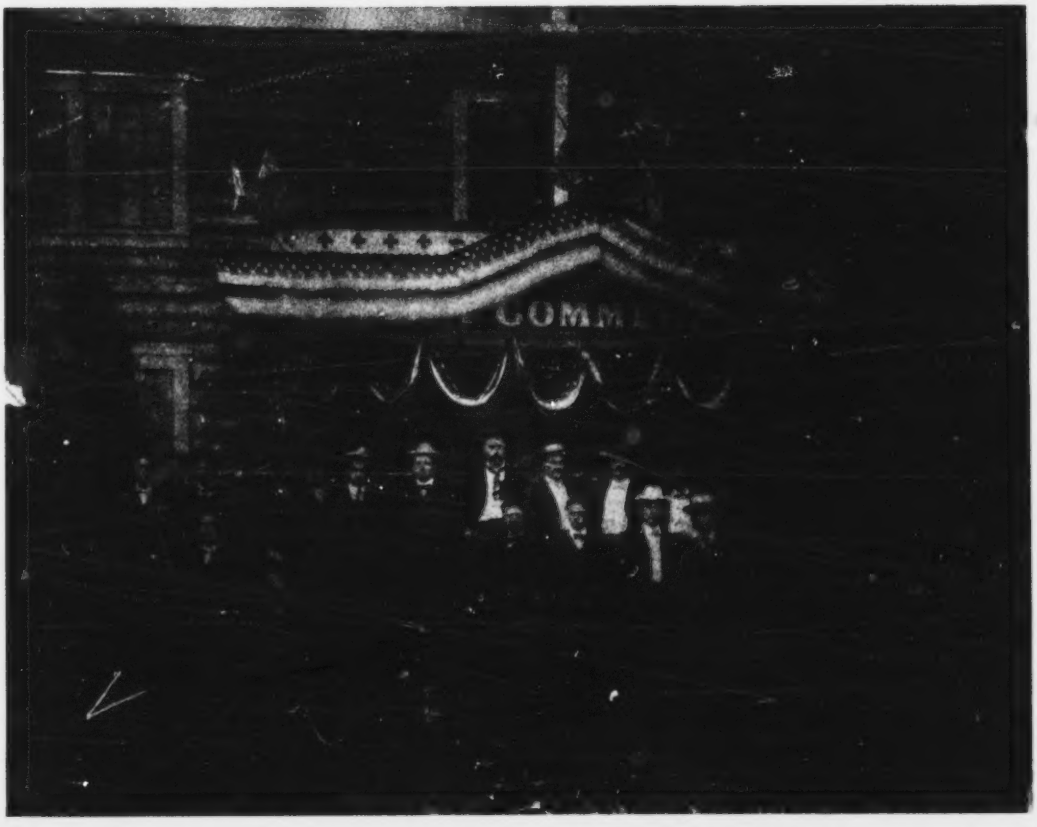


Figure 28. July 4, 1900. (Holt-Atherton Pacific Centre for Western Studies, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, W.G.A. Miller Collection.)

Site Use

Use of the Store

By the fall of 1898 Dawson's first trading post had become its largest department store, serving an increasingly wide range of customers. Whether ordering a yearly outfit, or buying goods from the shelf, the miner remained a key customer. For his benefit the company continued to extend an 8-month credit and accept payment in gold dust (actually, until 1900 in "trade dust," an adulterated dust worth a few dollars less per ounce than clean dust and used exclusively as a means of local exchange).[28] And, as the company advertised at its Front Street door and during clean-up season in the local newspapers, safe deposit was still a fundamental service offered the Klondike customer.[29] Late in 1898, however, much of the outfit business was removed from the

Figure 29. May, 1899. (Public Archives Canada.)

Front Street warehouses to those on Fifth Avenue,[30] and with it the downtown store lost some of its original trading post character.

In his tour of the building in October 1898 the Nugget reporter went to considerable length to impress his readers with the variety, quality and high style of the goods in stock, especially in dress and fancy goods available to both ladies and gentlemen. In addition to the departments reported in that article - groceries, hardware, glass and crockery, drugs and clocks, ladies' and gentlemen's furnishings, dry goods and household wares - the company advertised other classes of goods for sale in 1901: stationery, musical instruments, furs, mining machinery, boots and shoes, wines, liquors and cigars.[31]

While the A.C.Co. made considerable changes to its store and its stock to accommodate Dawson's increasingly stable population of outsiders, it continued to trade with the native population of the district, as it had traditionally done at previous trading posts along the Yukon River. The Moosehide band traded regularly and possibly exclusively with the A.C.Co.,[32] receiving company vouchers or tabs in exchange for furs, firewood and meat.

An important aspect of the company's trade in this period was its wholesale supply of other Dawson businesses. Many of the trading

companies in Dawson carried on a wholesale trade to some extent, but the A.C.Co. held the lion's share of the business. As a wholesale supplier, the company dealt directly with outside distributors, acted as its own shipper, and provided local storage between shipping seasons. As long as the company carried on a wholesale business in Dawson, the general offices on the ground floor of the store remained a focal point of commercial activity.

Use of Other Structures on the Block

The A.C.Co. made maximum use of its Dawson property in this period to carry on an impressive range of activities - from the industrial to the recreational - related to its primary wholesale and retail functions.

The staff quarters at the corner of Third Street and Second Avenue continued to house the company's male and female employees. An 1898 addition (at the north of the building, photographs indicate) was used for social functions and billiards rooms.[33]

In the three-storey office block completed in October 1898 the company rented out offices singly and in suites. Newspaper advertisements indicate that by the end of 1898 quarters were rented out to a number of lawyers, freighting companies, a steamship line and a public library. Canadian Customs and the Canadian Bank of Commerce each took an office there. By 1900 these tenants were joined by more freighting companies, mining brokers and engineers, dentists and the Dawson Board of Trade. The A.C.Co. office building had become a prestigious address indeed.

Activities carried on elsewhere on the block are difficult to place. The lack of a contemporary site plan and of good photographic records (only Fig. 30 shows the courtyard in this period) make it difficult to piece together existing references. The most complete, if somewhat disorienting, description of the delivery court or warehouse area as a whole appeared in the Nugget's October 1898 article on the company's quarters:

> From this court we step into the office of the warehouse checker, which might be called the "indicator" appropriately. The pages of the warehouseman's check book at all times is the inventory of the stock on hand and shows where each article is located. Adjoining this is the warm storage building with a capacity of 500 tons containing articles subject to freezing. Next is the ice house where the company stores its own ice. We now enter the assaying building containing one of he most complete plants possible, with forge furnaces and every requisite necessary, connected with which are a mining engineer and two assayers who devote their entire attention to claims, reports on same and assaying. Next we enter the three immense warehouses each containing 1500 tons of merchandise.[34]

The use of the most northerly warehouse as a firehall has already

Figure 30. Courtyard behind the office building, 24 May 1901. The roof in the background belongs to the Third Street annex. (Archives, University of Alaska, Bassoc Collection, 64-92-402.)

been mentioned. This was probably one of the warehouses opened by manager Hansen in April 1899 to temporarily house the homeless after one of Dawson's worst downtown fires.[35] And there was apparently enough space there a month later (presumably when the company's winter stocks were at their very lowest) for the firemen to hold their first annual ball.[36] In November 1899 the company made use of the east end of that warehouse to install its first steam heat and electric light plant.

Also located on the company block in this period was the manager's cabin (just north of the staff quarters), a company rink, a woodyard and a pump house for the Dawson waterworks. But by then the company had outgrown its original block. The construction of four warehouses on Fifth Avenue in 1898 was the first step away from the original waterfront property. By 1901 the company owned a third piece of property; a machine shop, used to produce mining machinery, was set up at the corner of Front and Fifth (Duke) streets.[37]

Townsite Context

By 1901 the A.C.Co. block had developed two distinct facades. The original log structure and adjacent three corrugated iron warehouses on Front Street gave the traditional appearance of trading posts elsewhere along the Yukon River. The rhythm of store and warehouse was repeated north along Front Street: the N.A.T.T.Co., the Alaska Exploration Company, the Ames Mercantile Company, the Ladue Company, and the Trading and Exploration Company. Together they formed a panorama of Dawson's shipping, warehousing and industrial district (Fig. 31).

The company turned its slick and business-like side to Third Street. Clad and painted, the store, annex and office building presented a continuous facade and a fine example of locally milled elegance. Third Street had always been a busy thoroughfare to the creeks, but it did not initially have the kind of built-up streetscape that one readily associates with Dawson's commercial core. Not until 1899 did the draining, cleaning and general improvement of the town's cross-streets begin.[38] The development of the company's block at one end, and the construction by the federal government of an imposing frame post office at the corner of Third Street and Third Avenue did much to designate Third Street as a respectable business address.

The store occupied a key position, locking in place the warehouse district and the downtown business core. At a more human level, the many photographs of special events, celebrations and parades centered at this intersection bear compelling witness to the A.C. corner's continued prominence in the street life of the town.

Figure 31. Portion of panorama of Dawson, Y.T., 17 July 1899. (Provincial Archives of British Columbia.)

PHASE III: 1901-21 CONSOLIDATION

Introduction

By 1901 business had slowed for the A.C.Co. In that year none of the Yukon River transportation companies broke even, and as Dawson's population shrank, stocks began to accumulate in the warehouses of all the trading companies.[1] On 1 June 1901 the A.C.Co. bought out the Alaska Exploration Company and the Empire Trading Company to form the Northern Commercial Company (N.C.Co.).[2] A comparable move by the company's shipping department produced the Northern Navigation Company. The merging of commercial interests in 1901 heralded a general era of consolidation which paralleled the Klondike's shift to capital - intensive mining in the same period. The trend continued: in 1912 the N.C.Co. bought out its trading rival of twenty years, the N.A.T.T.Co.; and in 1914 the Northern Navigation Company, the company's shipping arm, was sold to the White Pass and Yukon Route.[3]

The newly formed N.C.Co. brought with it a number of new properties, but before long the real effects of consoldiation were obvious. In 1902, for instance, the company developed grandiose plans for physical expansion, but thought better of carrying them out.[4] Increasing amounts of available space on the company block were rented out to other business interests, and by 1907 private offices occupied a portion of the store's second floor.

After some years of appearing run down (Figs. 32 and 33) the entire company block was given a bright coat of paint, probably in 1907

Figure 32. N.C.Co. store, with ticket office and steam heating plant across the street, ca. 1905. (Yukon Archives, No. 935, MacBride Museum Collection.)

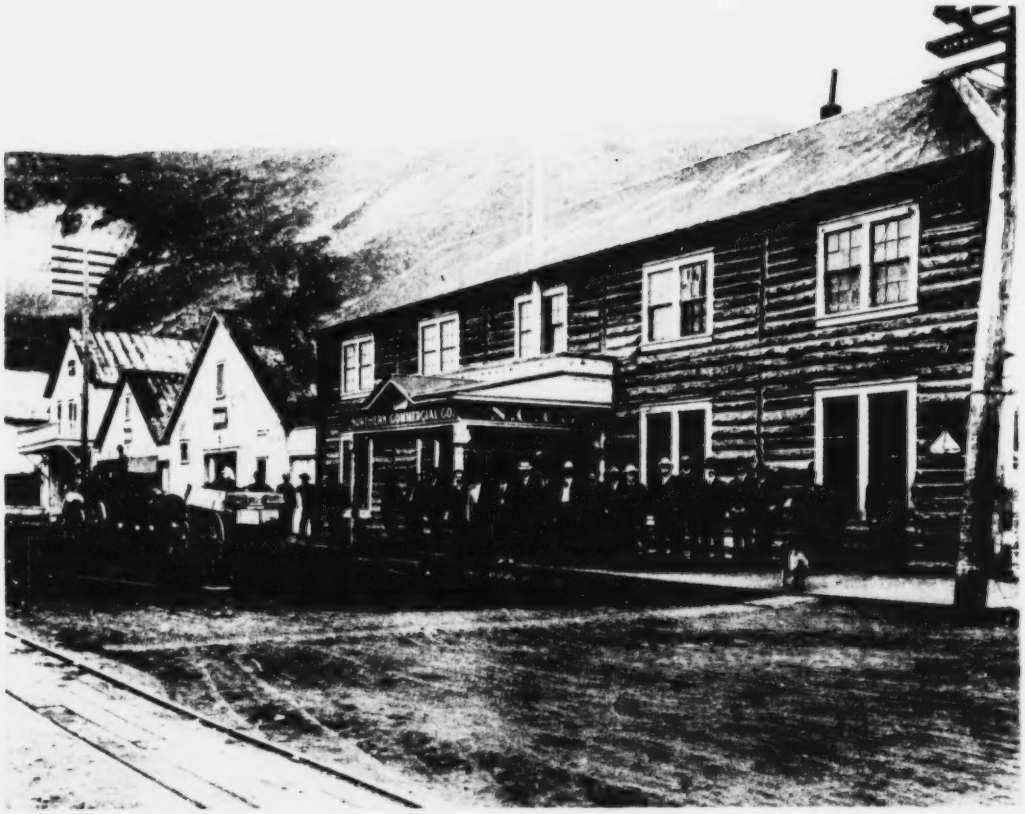


Figure 33. Looking up Front Street from N.C.Co. store, ca. 1906. (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

(Fig. 34). That face lift may or may not have been more than skin deep. The facade on Front Street, called First Avenue after 1901, was painted for the first time, and two familiar features were altered: the main door was converted to a window, and the large roof letters were painted out (Fig. 3). By 1907 the store was completely oriented to King Street, as Third Street was called after 1901. The transition was finalized in the removal of the First Avenue porch ca. 1914.

Structural Evolution

Exterior Changes and Property Acquisitions

The 1901 merger had little effect on the building at First and King; at first, only signage lettering was changed (Fig. 35). Within a year a doorway was reintroduced in the King Street wall of the main store and shortly after that the First Avenue door was boarded up.

Figure 34. King Street, ca. 1907. (Courtesy, The Bancroft Library University of California, Berkeley, No. 17109-6268.)

Certainly, by 1905 all public access to the store was from King Street.[5] At about this time (probably in 1906), the north upstairs window in the store's First Avenue facade was enlarged from a double to a triple window (Fig. 36).

In 1907 a number of changes appear to have taken place, suggesting that the company undertook a full round of repairs that year. Most of the visible work occurred on the King Street facade (Fig. 34). A second door was constructed at that end, just west of the wall between the main store and the 1898 addition. Alterations required to connect that doorway to the second floor were carried out,[6] and it was probably at the same time that the second floor windows in the store's 1898 addition were doubled in size. Post cards published ca. 1908 (Fig. 3) show these changes as well as the complete conversion of the Front Street doorway to a window. As if to announce the company's withdrawal from river transportation, the porch overlooking the waterfront was removed by 1914.[7]

The June 1901 merger increased the property holdings of the N.C.Co. The company took over the Alaska Exploration Company store on First

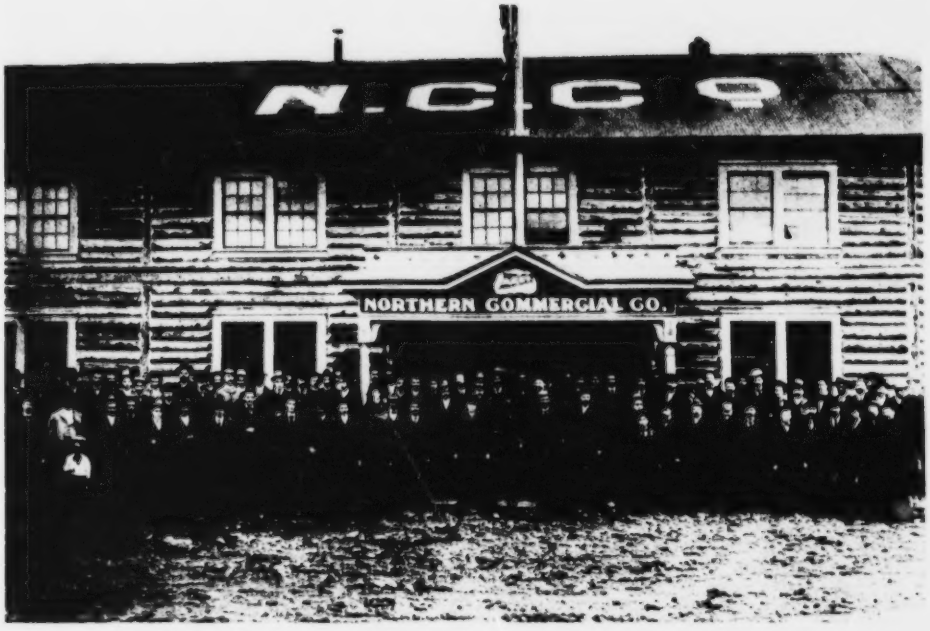


Figure 35. N.C.Co. staff, 1901. (Zaccarelli's Pictorial Souvenir Book of the Golden Northland, Vancouver Public Library, No. 30715.)

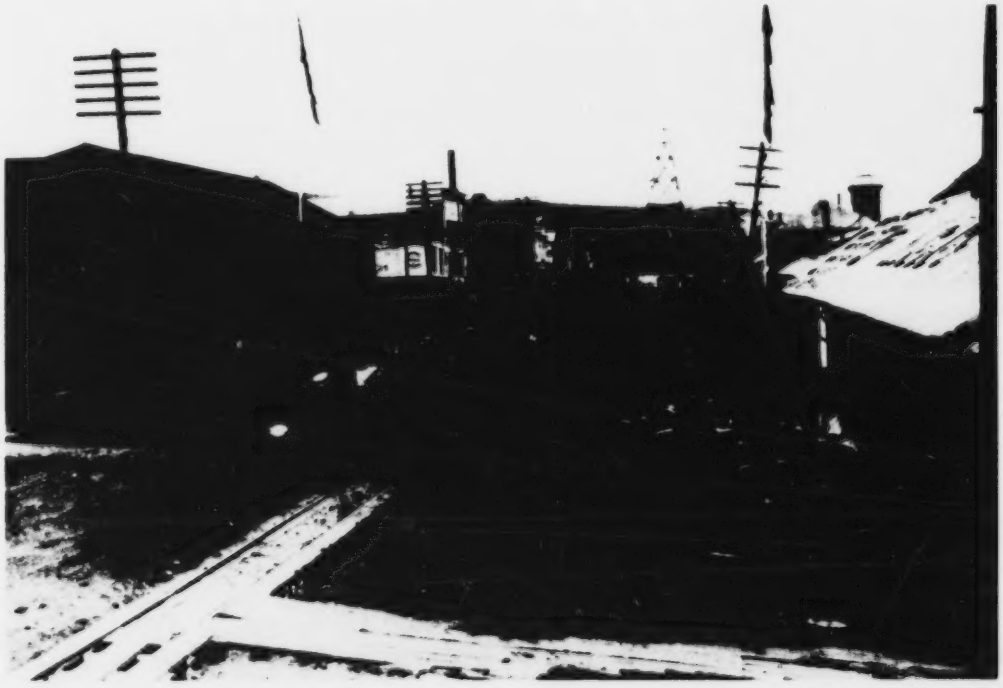


Figure 36. First Avenue, ca. 1906. (Yukon Archives No. 3824, MacBride Museum Collection.)

Avenue between York and Duke streets and the large complex of Empire Trading Company warehouses, located further along the waterfront, between Edward and George streets. To accommodate the larger sales and warehousing staff working for the N.C.Co. after 1901 a second storey was constructed on the northernmost warehouse in the company block.[8] Hoping to consolidate its many retail lines of operation under one roof, the company planned a $50,000 construction program to take place on its main block in 1902.[9] The manager's cabin, the original staff quarters and the office building were all to have been moved to new foundations to make way for a 90-ft by 40-ft retail annex to the store. The company went so far as to accept bids on the work, but at the last minute scuttled the project. A major project which the company did carry out in 1902 was the construction of a power plant on its waterfront block, across First Avenue from the foot of York.[10] The plant provided steam heat and lighting for all company buildings as well as water for the company's fire department.

Foundation Work

The post and sill foundations of the N.C.Co. store, like those of other buildings in Dawson required systematic maintenance. Every few years blocks had to be inserted in those sections of the foundations where uneven settling took place. Dawson contractors were by no means in agreement on how best to deal with the effects of permafrost, already apparent in Dawson structures only a few years after construction. By 1904 the N.C.Co.'s store foundations required substantial repair especially under the 150-ton vault, where a previously level access from the ground floor had come to require two steps.[11] In approaching the problem the company took inspiration from work recently undertaken in the city's federal governement buildings, where hydraulic jacks had been used to raise the affected portions of the structures and block them up on new foundations. The company reported that it would use 40 jacks to lift the vault mass. "In raising the vault, it will be first undermined by degrees until short blocks can be inserted upon which the jacks will rest."[12] At the same time the company inserted huge squared timbers as supports to the upper floor. Whether these supports were temporary or permanent was not made clear. Certainly, none are visible in Figure 37 taken in 1909. Neither the frequency nor the success of this kind of foundation renewal is known.

Layout

Structurally speaking, almost no changes to the store were reported in this period, although some shifts in the layout of departments took place. Groceries, boots and shoes, advertised late in 1901[13] were undoubtedly displayed in the north end of the ground floor, and they were still displayed there in 1909 (Fig. 37). A newspaper report of 1902 implies that offices, cashier's desk and vault continued to form a single unit or department at the King Street end of that floor.[14]

As part of an inspection report on the building in 1905 the Dawson

Figure 37. N.C.Co. grocery department, 1909. (Public Archives Canada.)

City fire department listed the building's exits at that date.[15] There were two doors on King Street, one in the main store and one in the annex. Two more exits led from the north side of the store into the adjacent warehouses. One is very likely the door visible in Figure 37, which may have led through a covered passageway into the warehouse.

In 1907 rooms on the second floor of the building were "fitted up" for the American consul.[16] To provide direct access from King Street to these and other offices (Drs. Barrett and Thompson, physicians, acquired offices there at about the same time), a new doorway was opened on the ground floor and a new stairway constructed. It seems likely that the staircase ran north from the door, but one can only speculate about its configuration and relationship to the original stairs.

Figure 38 (taken in 1909, according to the wall calendar) offers a view of the consul's newly renovated quarters. Aspects of the room's configuration might well date to 1907, but the interior partition wall (visible at the right of the photograph) is more likely original. Certainly, the practice of partitioning from the centre mullion of a double window is one shown in an earlier photograph (Fig. 13). In fact, Figures 13 and 38 may show two sides of one partition. The presence of suspension rods (marking the location of the centre beam) gives some idea of the width of the room relative to the overall width of the building.

How much of the store's second floor was turned over to office space is not known. The fire department's 1905 report indicates

warehouse as well as office functions on that level. By 1915 there may have been no offices there at all. A city directory of that year gives no Dawson entry for the American consul, and shows that Barrett and Thompson were no longer practicing in the city either.[17] Eventually, the company used this second floor for living quarters. The practice may well have begun in this period.

Interior Finishes, Fittings and Mechanical Systems

Ground floor finishes in 1909 (Fig. 37) appear to have changed little from those seen in 1901 (Fig. 23), although the interior was painted in that time. New commercial fittings (display cases, shelves, counters and stools) were added, or at least are newly visible in the later photograph. While the position of the office section has not changed, the actual segment visible in Figure 37 is not identical to that shown in Figures 24 and 25.

The consul's office in 1909 probably combined original materials and recent applications. The fashionable gilt wallpaper (Appendix A)

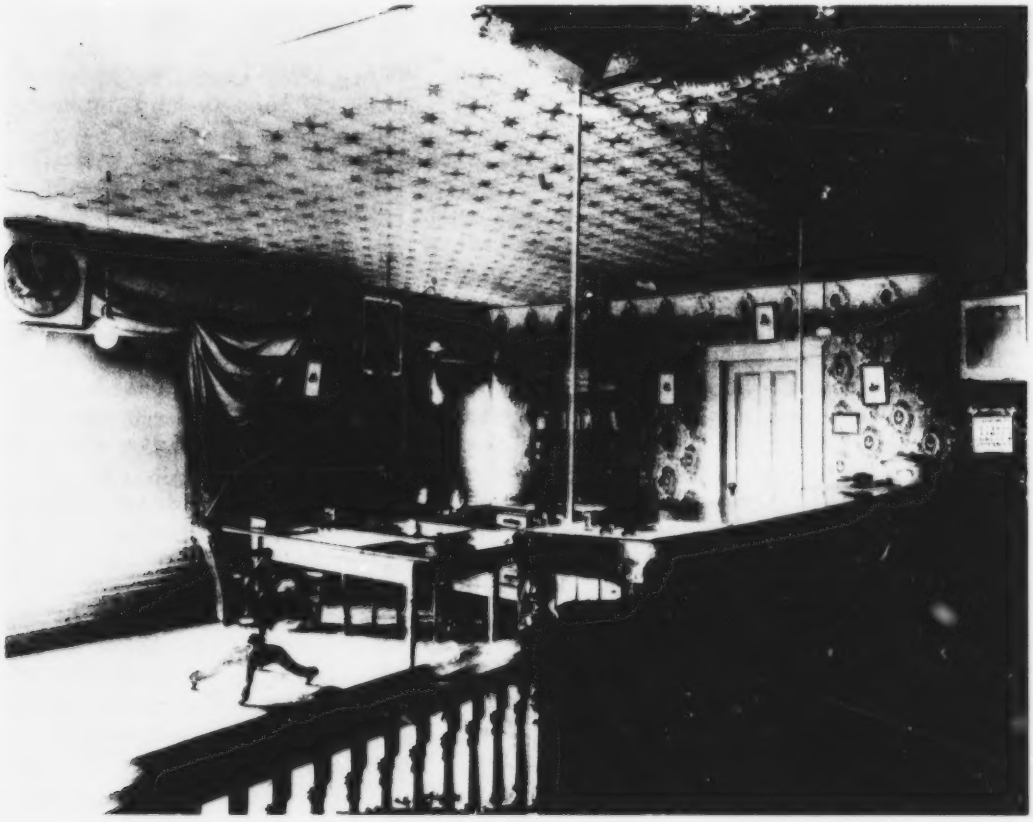


Figure 38. American consul's office, February, 1909. (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

with an 18-inch border and matching ceiling pattern was almost certainly the work of 1907. The room was carpeted, decorated with the official trappings of the office, but otherwise simple in its furnishings. Sash and door work, window blinds and possibly even counters and railings may all have been part of the building's original fabric. Nonetheless, this room was considerably more elegant in appearance than the second floor office shown in an earlier photograph (Fig. 13).

Some changes to the building's mechanical systems are visible in Figures 37 and 38. Electric lights on both floors wre covered with glass shades of a similar pattern. In Figure 37, pipes through the ceiling near the east wall indicate the availability of running water in the building. Steam heating pipes are visible in both photographs: on the lower left of Figure 38 and the lower right of Figure 37. By December 1901 the company was providing steam heat and electric lighting for itself and other downtown customers from a plant at the Yukon Saw Mill Co.[18] In 1902 the company constructed a power plant for its exclusive use. While the company continued to generate its own steam heat at least until the 1920s, it may have turned to the Dawson Electric Light and Power Co. for its electricity at some time in this period.

Exterior Finishes and Fittings

It was probably in 1907 that the entire block received a much-needed coat of paint. The roof letters were painted over and small N.C.Co. pennants (probably in red, the colour of the company flag) were painted on the face of each building in the block. Awnings appear frequently in photographs taken between 1901 and 1908, over the King Street doorway, upstairs windows, the display windows in the annex and along the front of the office building. The opening in 1907 of the additional King Street door leading o the second floor quarters introduced signage relative to those offices: the small overhanging sign of physicians Barrett and Thompson, and an American seal for the U.S. consul. The survival of a noticeboard at the N.C corner is also of interest. The original bulletin boards were replaced by a blackboard, but it clearly no longer served a vital function. While its presence is documented in several photographs, none shows any messages.

Site Use

Use of the Store

Northern Commercial Company advertisements in 1901 and 1902 continued to announce a full line of goods, not all of which were carried in the main store.[19] Groceries, dry goods, boots and shoes, wines and liquors were all sold in the store at First and King, and safety deposit boxes were still available there ($2 per month, $20 per year, absolute security guaranteed, open Saturday nights 11:00 to 12:30). Hardware, crockery, glassware, furniture, carpets, wallpaper,

as well as machinery (such as boilers and steam fittings) and heavy hardware (stoves) were sold on the old Alaska Exploration Company premises. In 1905 the company sold out its dry goods department, leaving only groceries and hardware in the main store.[20] At what point the departments in the Alaska Exploration Company building were closed or moved back into the N.C.Co. headquarters at First and King is not known. In 1913 the company advertised groceries, liquors, cigars, tobacco, hardware and mining implements.[21] In both quantity and variety those stocks represented a pale shadow of what had been available in the A.C.Co.'s emporium between 1898 and 1901.

While a shrinking population was reflected in the volume of retail trade transacted, the company did continue to do business on several fronts. It maintained a fur trade with bands from Moosehide and Peel River,[22] it outfitted independent miners and carried contracts with a number of large mining companies who provisioned their camps from company stocks.[23] In essence, the company continued to pursue its traditional range of trading activities, but it did so on a reduced scale.

Use of Other Structures on the Block

The company continued to make maximum use of its main block, at least in the first part of this period, but it did so by renting out increasing amount of the property, for both residential and commercial uses.

The N.C.Co. did not for long require two staff houses. By 1904 it had consolidated staff on the second floor of the north warehouse. In that year the American consul took over the original staff quarters building at the corner of King Street and Second Avenue, maintaining the second floor private living space.[24] In 1907 the company rented that building to the Yukon Gold Company as a head office.[25]

It is quite likely that the N.C.Co.'s office building was never rented to capacity. Certainly space was frequently advertised after 1899. The company did, however, keep the building rented to a well-heeled clientele through most of this period. Doctors, lawyers, freighting firms, mining companies and brokers had offices there. The U.S. consul was a tenant until 1904, and the Yukon Telephone Syndicate after 1903.[26] By 1905, nevertheless, the company had converted the third floor of the building and part of the second to residential space.[27]

It appears that before 1903 the Yukon Telephone Syndicate used as its central exchange the small structure whose facade linked the King Street annex to the office building. In 1903 that space was taken over by the Northern Commercial fire department, still providing auxiliary service to the city of Dawson.[28] Photographs taken ca. 1908 show the space occupied by the agent of the Independent Steamer Prospector.

The city fire department's inspection report for 1905 implies that all warehouses on the company block were in use. The warehouse closest to the store was used for warm storage, the log building behind it (Fig. 30) for liquor and the second floor of the north warehouse for staff quarters. It seems likely that the company made continuous use of its storage buildings in this period.

Townsite Context

By 1907 the company's public orientation to King Street was complete. The addition of a number of windows and doors in that facade indicated attempts on the part of the company and its tenants to exploit their access to King Street. Photographs of the street taken ca. 1903 (Figs. 39 and 40) and ca. 1908 (Fig. 34) show one of Dawson's busiest commercial cross-streets, a bustling thoroughfare lined with large and small businesses.

Commercial sophistication was evident in the office blocks along the south side of the street. The Bank Building, the Rochester Block and the Portland Block each housed the same kinds of business offices and company headquarters found in the N.C.Co. buildings on the other side of King Street.

Urban erosion in the form of markedly reduced property values, vacant lots and empty buildings gradually took its toll as Dawson's population continued to shrink. Nonetheless, the town survived as a service and transportation centre and its business district remained well anchored by the N.C.Co. block at First and King.

Figure 39. Birds-eye view of a portion of the waterfront, ca. 1903. (Public Archives Canada.)

Figure 40. King Street, ca. 1903. (Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington.)

PHASE IV: 1921-51 RENEWED CONFIDENCE

Introduction

In the years of Dawson's steady decline the First World War struck a singularly serious blow. Production costs rose, gold prices were fixed[1] and a generation of young men not only went to war but in many cases returned to settle elsewhere on the continent. The N.C.Co. suffered at all its branches, and one by one sold them off to indivdual local managers. The Dawson post was offered for sale to a group of employees who took possession of the store 1 May 1921. J.A. Donald and Co. Ltd. announced in the local press that it was their intention to remain at the old stand in Dawson and carry on the usual line of trade with some adjustment to meet the conditions.[2] In fact the new management did more. It spearheaded a move among other manager/owners to repurchase the entire N.C.Co. chain. This was accomplished in 1922, and the new firm incorporated under the familiar name Northern Commercial Company Limited.[3] A post was established at Mayo, the Yukon's newest boom-town, and in Dawson the existing store was completely ouverhauled. The "N.C. store" was back in business.

The company did survive the post-war years with some adjustment, but continued to provide Dawson's population (stable at well under a thousand souls) with most of its domestic and industrial needs. Important to the company's survival in this period was its major contract, the provision of all Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Ltd. camps on a cost-plus basis.[4] Together, the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Ltd. and the N.C.Co. - indeed Dawson's population generally -weathered the depression years exceedingly well. The drop in commodity prices against the fixed value of gold had the effect of a minor boom in the Klondike's placer fields. The company responded to favourable local conditions: in 1937 a new retail annex to the store was built on the site of the 1898 office building, demolished the previous year.

In 1951 fire destroyed the company's buildings at Front and King and took the lives of two residents on the store's upper floor. The Northern Commercial Company Ltd. stayed on in Dawson, and in 1953 reopened in new reduced quarters on Queen Street. The store, like Dawson itself, survived the move of the territorial capital to Whitehorse in 1953 and, less successfully, the shut-down of Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Ltd. in 1966. In 1968-69 the company pulled out of all of its Yukon retail outlets. At that time the Dawson store was purchased by a group of local businessmen incorporated in 1969 as the D.C.W. Trading Post Ltd.

Structural Evolution

The 1922 Project

Major changes to the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. store in this period took place in two specific construction projects, the first and larger of which was undertaken during the 1922 building season. When construction was complete Dawson had its first "modern" department store, an open and spacious interior emphasized by plate glass display windows along its First and King streets.

The 1922 renovations were certainly more than cosmetic. After 20 years of constant blocking and repair the store's foundation system was completely reworked.[5] Under the existing grid of posts and sills 136 new piles, each 16 ft in length, were driven to the gravel which underlay the soil at a depth of approximately 15 ft.[6] Not only had Dawson builders come to believe in the improved stability of foundations resting on gravel at 15 ft rather than on "permanently frozen soil" at 4 ft or 5 ft, but the placer mining industry had provided them with the necessary technology - in steam thawing points - to gain access to the gravel base. On its new foundations the existing structure was levelled and reinforced. The walls that had previously separated the original store, the 1898 addition and the passageway to the King Street annex were replaced with posts and beams. The store's vault was finally dislodged from its original location, removed from its masonry casing and shifted to the rear (north end) of the retail space.[7]

A striking feature of the more modern and attractive[8] store was its plate glass facade on King Street. Seventy feet of plate glass were reportedly installed, running, it appears, from the east wall of the 1898 addition (just visible in Fig. 41) to the corner of the building, with another section facing First Avenue. The store's interior was refinished in "sawed pulpboard," its electrical system replaced with concealed wiring and "pendant dissolving globes and shades," and its steam heating system overhauled.[9] Both the interior and exterior were repainted. (Fig. 42 suggests that only the King Street facade was painted in 1922, for the First Avenue wall seems not to have been touched since the porch was removed ca. 1914.) Figure 42 shows a new entrance on the Front Street facade. Cut in the store's northwest bay, the door gave access both to the packing and shipping area newly created at the north end of the store and to the adjacent warehouse.

The 1937 Project

Vacant and a nuisance to the company, the N.C.Co. office building was demolished in 1936. The following year a new building to provide additional retail space was constructed on the site.[10] Like the new foundations placed under the store building in 1922, piles supporting the new single-storey structure were placed on gravel. In actual fact, hopes in 1922 for a building which would be "permanent and unshakeable" had been short-lived, for the 16-ft foundation piles installed in that year had proven far from maintenance-free. Uneven settling remained a

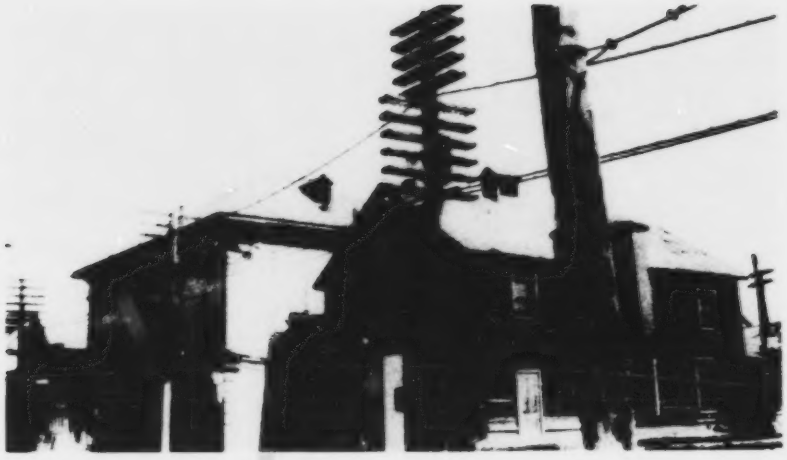


Figure 41. King Street, 1922. (National Historic Parks and Sites Collection.)

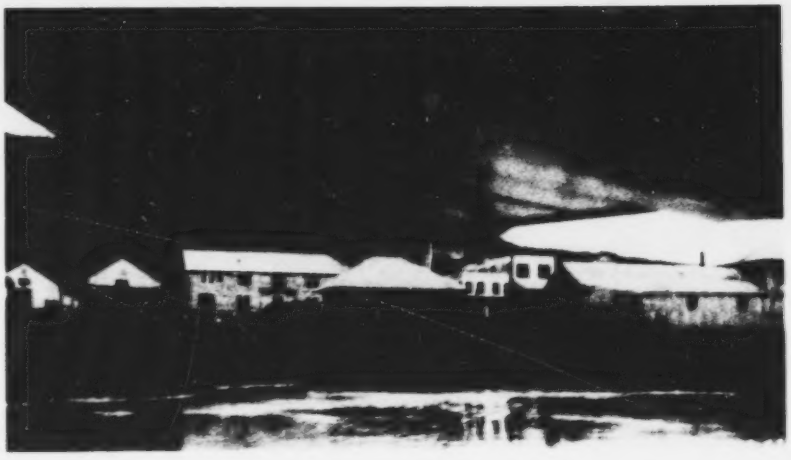


Figure 42. Portion of Dawson's waterfront, 1929. (Department of the Interior photograph, National Historic Parks and Sites Collection.)

persistent problem and managers in this period accepted yearly rounds of shimming and wedging as part of a permanent maintenance cycle.

The new addition's King Street facade, six plate glass bays and a central recessed double doorway, was constructed flush with a reworked facade on the existing King Street annex (Fig. 43). There, the pattern of continuous plate glass was repeated for five bays. Two of the 1922 doorways were retained: the recessed double door into the main store (just west of what had been the east wall of the original store), and the single door into the link or passageway between the main store and the annex.

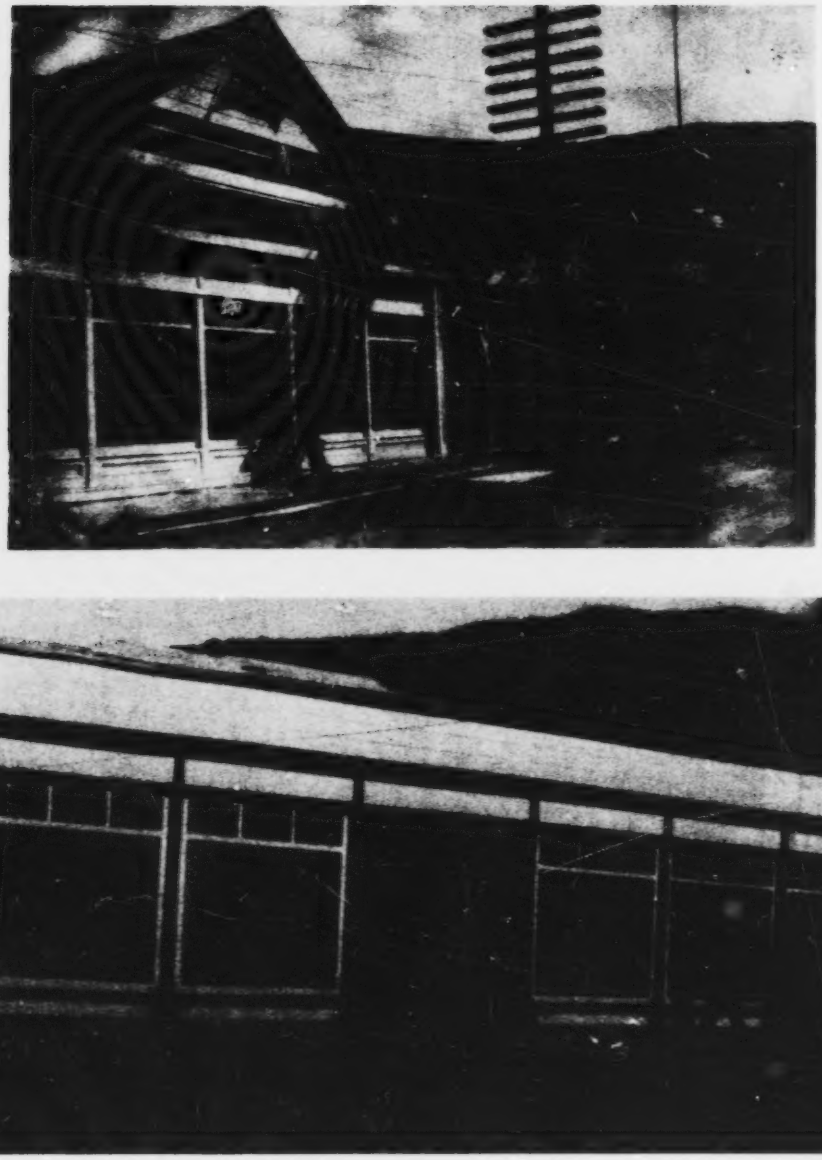


Figure 43. a) Construction of new annex 1937; b) new annex, ca. 1937. (Courtesy Evelyn Dubois.)

Figure 44 (1939) shows other changes which probably resulted from 1937 construction. The First Avenue facade of the building was framed in lumber and the upstairs windows reduced in size and given a more modern profile. Two of the downstairs windows were covered over entirely. The photograph also suggests that a new roof was applied, but it may simply have been repainted. The whole building was painted white

Figure 44. Dawson waterfront, 1939. (Geological Survey of Canada No. 84799, Bostock.)

with green trim.[11] A large awning and a simple sign ("NORTHERN COMMERCIAL CO. LTD.") over the door nearest the corner may have been applied as early as 1922. By the 1940s however, the awning was replaced by a small gable-roofed porch and the sign moved to the pediment over the King Street annex. In a sense the 1937 project brought the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. to something of natural completion. The framing and painting of the First Avenue facade, eagerly anticipated by the local press in 1900,[12] was at last accomplished. And the "unbroken expense of plate glass windows from the corner to where the office building now stands,"[13] designed and abandoned in 1902, was finally realized 35 years later.

Layout and Use of the Store and Company Block

C.H. (Chappie) Chapman managed the Dawson store of the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. from 1933 to 1949. His account of business methods of the period as well as his renderings of contemporary store and site plans have been extremely useful.[14] However, the store as Chapman knew it had been so altered by the renovations of 1922 that its original layout and orientation were imperceptible (Fig. 45). The replacement of walls with post and beam construction had opened up a large area, 70 ft along King Street and 50 ft deep.[15] The retail area in the main store no longer ran a full 80 ft from north to south; instead, almost half of the north end was converted into a shipping and packing room and storage space. The grocery department, displaced from its previous north end position, occupied the remainder of what had been the ground floor of the original store. The ground floor of the 1898 addition was given over to hardware. A passageway, possibly one constructed in 1899, connected the main store to the earlier King Street annex, which was used for clothing and dry goods. The 1937 addition was used to house furnishings, general hardware and plumbing fixtures.[16]

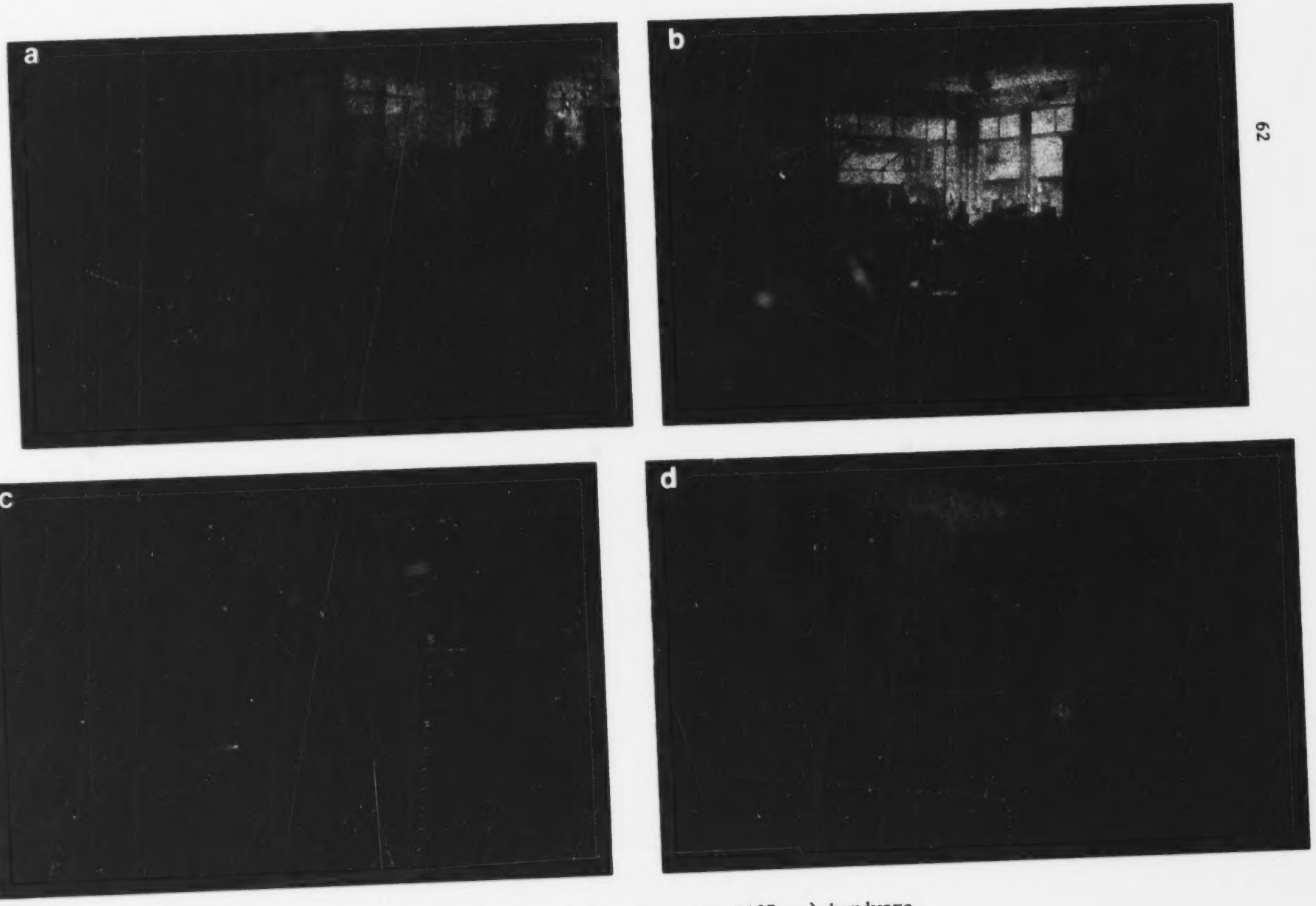


Figure 45. Interior, N.C.Co. store ca. 1937: a) hardware, b) groceries, c) hardware and groceries, d) shoes and dry goods. (Courtesy Evelyn Dubois.)

By the 1940s, tobacco products and men's clothing filled the King Street annex, women's clothing and household furnishings the 1937 addition.

In many respects the store's layout after 1922 reflected a number of changes which had taken place in retailing methods since the store's construction. In the first decade of the century, for example, a shopper rarely had access to goods on shelves, but was seated at the counter and served by a clerk. Payment was arranged at the central cashier's wicket, where accounts could be settled in dust or in cash. By the late 1930s shelves were lower and a number of wares were accessible on low islands in the centre of the floor. One brought one's goods, and cash, to the cash register in each department.

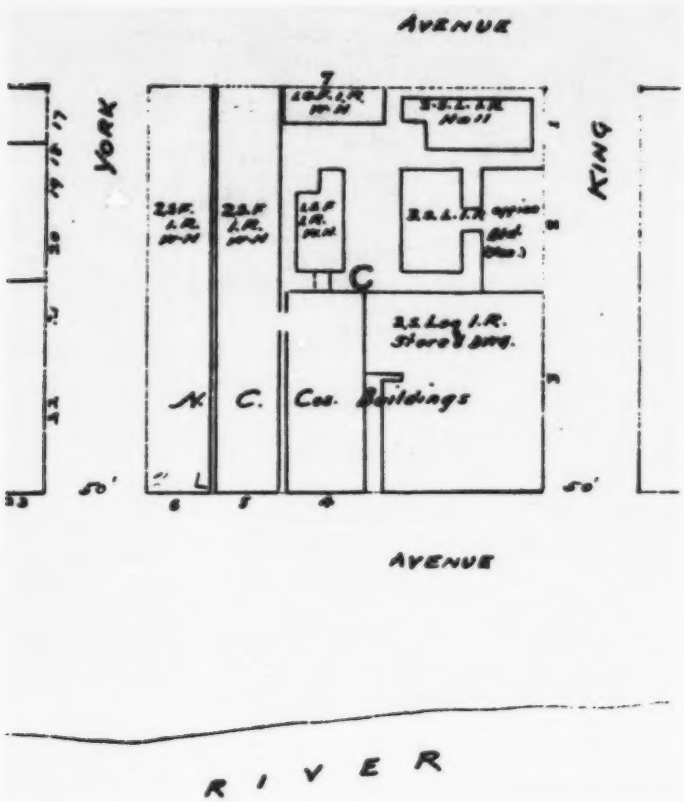
But there were, too, aspects of the store that still reflected the peculiarities of the Dawson trade. The block of wicketed offices had been removed, but an order desk still stood at the front of the store. The office area, in the northeast corner of the main store's retail space still proudly displayed its set of gold scales, then used solely to weigh in dust left for safe keeping. The vault, also moved to that corner in 1922, continued to play its role as safe deposit for the gold and valuables of Dawson customers. Eventually it tilted so precariously that it was removed completely. The store also maintained a fur department after 1922,[17] although the priority given to the fur trade in Dawson varied according to the interests of the local manager.

By the late 1930s the company dealt in hardware, clothing, furnishings, furs, hay and feed, Dodge cars and trucks, and Caterpillar tractors - a trade as diverse as business had been at the turn of the century.

At what point the second floor of the main store was turned over to staff housing is not known. A 1929 photograph (Fig. 42) shows a closed staircase at the northwest corner of the building. In the 1930s and 1940s those stairs led to the manager's quarters, as they probably did in 1929. The manager's apartment occupied the north end of the building and the single men's quarters the south, the latter made accessible by stairs in the link at the southeast corner of the main store. At the time of the fire in 1951 there appear to have been five separate apartments over the store.[18]

After the First World War the company found its rental properties increasingly difficult to maintain. A week before announcing its takeover by the J.A. Donald and Co. in 1921 the N.C.Co. donated the staff quarters building at the corner of King and Second to the Yukon Order of Pioneers.[19] Predictably, the office building became a white elephant at the same time, and was torn down in 1936. Nor did a town the size of Dawson still require the vast amount of storage the company maintained. Two of the warehouses between Fifth and Sixth avenues were dismantled and shipped to Mayo when the company opened its new store there in 1921. Such was the time-honoured tradition of boom-town succession.

The company did, however, continue to make full use of its warehouse property at First and King (Fig. 46). The warehouse closest to the store provided the company's freezing and cold storage department: meats were held at the west end, eggs at the east. A passageway into the packing and shipping room in the northwest corner of



Legend

L	log	S	storey
F	frame	WH	warehouse
IR	iron roof	DWG	dwelling

Figure 46. Portion of Fire Insurance Plan of Dawson, 1932. T.A. Firth, Dawson. (University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections Division, Insurers' Advisory Organization Collection. Courtesy T.A. Firth and Son Ltd., Whitehorse, Yukon.)

the main store building was used to run a meat track from the store's shipping entrance (Fig. 42) to the warehouse. There appears to have been no direct access from the warehouse to the King Street annex, i.e. between the two branches of the L-shaped structure. The log structure attached to the east end of this warehouse was used as a root house for storage of fruit and vegetables. A wood stove kept temperatures there above freezing.

The second and third warehouses, both running the full depth of the block, were unheated structures used for non-perishable items. The north warehouse stored tabacco, cigars, cigarettes, flour and sugar; the middle structure rice, cereal and packaged breakfast cereals. Access to both buildings was gained from a central door at each end of the middle

warehouse. Tracks were still used to convey goods, both inside the warehouses and between the company block and the warehouses between Fifth and Sixth avenues.

The log building (originally the manager's cabin) facing Second Avenue north of the Yukon Order of Pioneers hall was used in this period as the sales office and parts store-room for Caterpillar tractors, a department which accounted for an important part of company sales. In fact, the Caterpillar division of the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. has long outlived the company's other mercantile interests in the Yukon.

10 December 1951

At 3:35 a.m. fire of undetermined origin broke through the wall separating warehouse and store in the company's L-shaped structure.[20] With the exception of the Yukon Order of Pioneers hall, the entire block was razed (Fig. 47). Two lives were lost and some $390,000 of stock destroyed. It was the kind of midwinter fire that Dawson had always feared, destroying as it did a major portion of the town's food supply. For that very reason the company had persisted in dividing its stocks between its waterfront and Fifth Avenue warehouses. Because this was a mid-20th century fire, however, Dawson's short stocks were readily replaced by air and road from Whitehorse. Within two years the Northern Commercial Company Ltd. reopened its general mercantile business in quarters more appropriate in size to the town's population; they continued to provision the town for another 16 years.

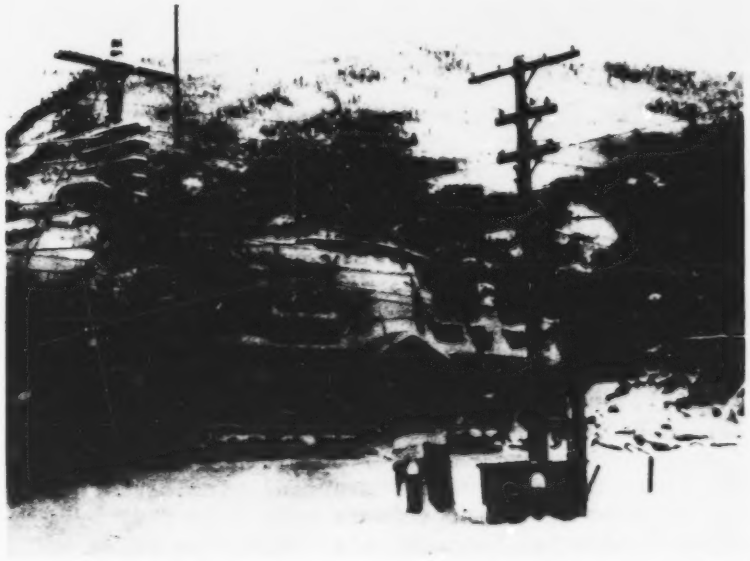


Figure 47. N.C.Co. after the fire. (Courtesy Jessie McCausland.)

CONCLUSIONS

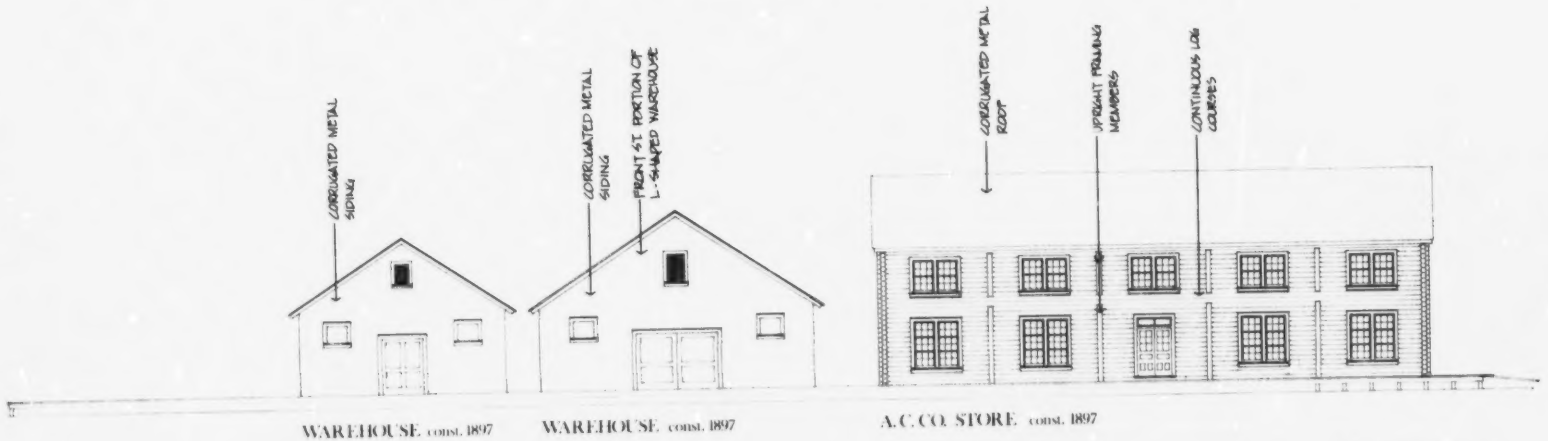
It is by neither coincidence nor sheer good luck that so many photographs of the Alaska/Northern Commercial Company's store in Dawson have come to light. The store represented a physical landmark and a point of departure for all manner of local activities. The building itself was frequently the subject for numerous photographers interested in recording scenes of gold-rush Dawson. Other photographers, drawn to the A.C. corner by gatherings and events of local interest or curiosity, unwittingly captured the store as their background. Still others, professionals like Goetzman and Ellingsen, were commissioned by the company to produce promotional photographs of its property (Fig. 3), its staff (Fig. 35), its stock (Fig. 37) and its treasury (Fig. 25). By their sheer number these photographs have made possible a framework of the building's structural chronology.

The store's structure is of considerable interest, for in each phase of its evolution the company made use of the best of available materials and the most appropriate of local building techniques. In constructing the store in 1897 the A.C.Co. drew on the expertise of veteran builders; in expanding the building in 1898 the company commanded thousands of board feet of milled lumber at a time when others found there was none to be had; and in modernizing the store in 1922 the branch at Dawson could call upon the resources of an international company to keep the store competitively up to date.

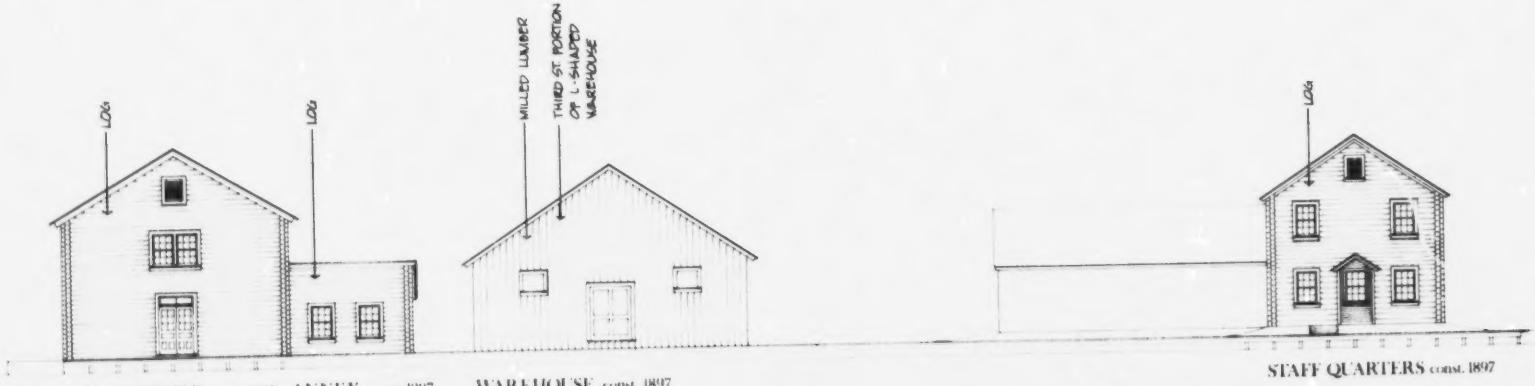
Of even greater interest is the store's significant place in Dawson's urban context. The company's range of mercantile interests touched all aspects of life. Equally, its block of property and more specifically its store at the corner of First and King became and remained a focal point for Dawson's urban activities. Axes of commercial and industrial activity along both King and First were largely defined by company properties on those streets.

Gradually, those axes disintegrated. As the company withdrew from river transportation, it oriented itself increasingly to King Street. Ironically, the company invested in a major restatement of its King Street facade just as the post office, a major factor in generating traffic, closed its doors at King and Third. Nonetheless, Dawson's business community continued to ally itself with the fortunes of Northern Commercial, and greeted all construction activity at First and King with an ageless optimism:

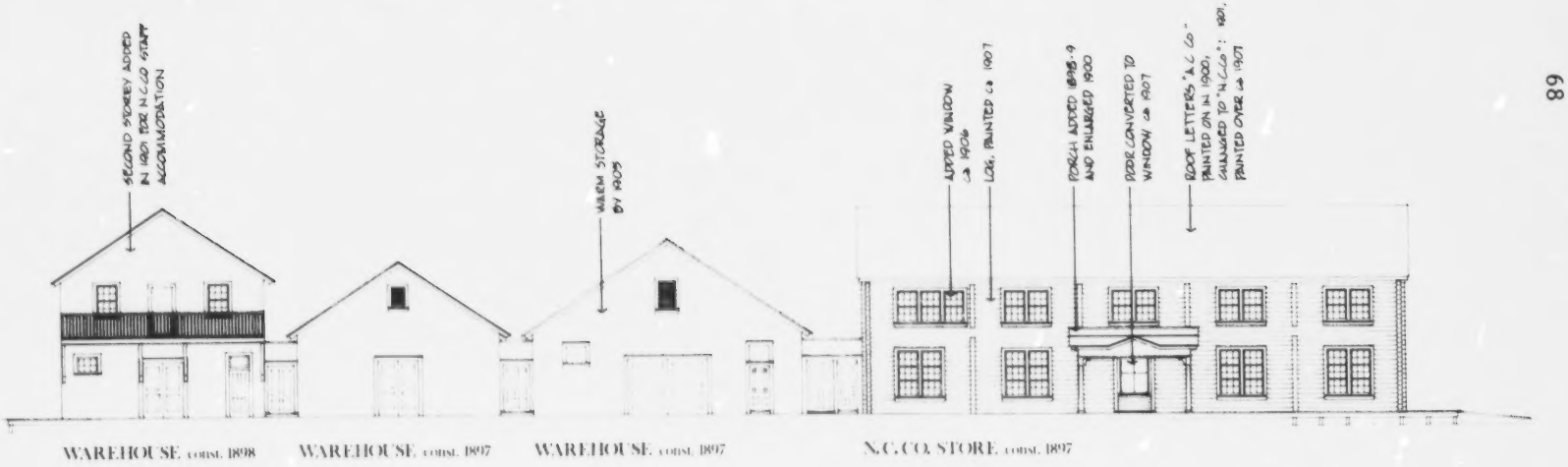
> The most substantial expression of confidence in the future of Dawson manifested in commercial circles for years was the extensive improvements made this year by the Northern Commercial Company, Limited to its large general store in the city.[1]



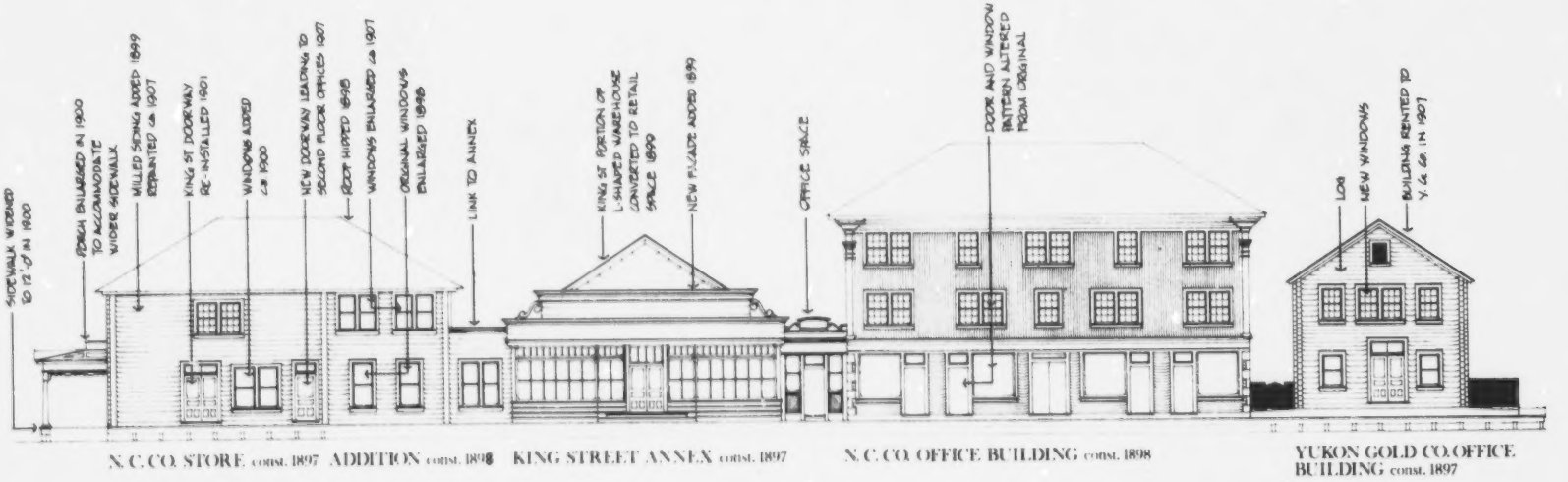
annotated streetscape
fig. 48 FRONT STREET 1897



annotated streetscape
fig. 49 THIRD STREET 1897


SECOND STOREY ADDED IN 1901 FOR N.C.CO STAFF ACCOMMODATION
WAREHOUSE const. 1898
WAREHOUSE const. 1897
WAREM STORAGE BY 1905
WAREHOUSE const. 1897
ADDED WINDOW c. 1906
LOG, PAINTED c. 1907
PORCH ADDED 1898-9 AND ENLARGED 1900
DOOR CONVERTED TO WINDOW c. 1907
ROOF LETTERS "N.C. CO." PAINTED ON IN 1900; CHANGED TO "N.C.CO."; 1901, PAINTED OVER c. 1907
N.C. CO. STORE const. 1897

annotated streetscape
fig. 50 FIRST AVENUE ca. 1908


SIDEWALK WIDENED TO 12'-0" IN 1900
PORCH ENLARGED IN 1900 TO ACCOMMODATE WIDER SIDEWALK
WILLED SIGNS ADDED 1899 REPAINTED c. 1907
KING ST. DOORWAY RE-INSTALLED 1901
WINDOWS ADDED c. 1900
NEW DOORWAY LEADING TO SECOND FLOOR OFFICES 1907
ROOF RAISED 1898
WINDOWS ENLARGED c. 1907
ORIGINAL WINDOWS ENLARGED 1898
LINK TO ANNEX
KING ST. PORTION OF L-SHAPED WAREHOUSE CONVERTED TO RETAIL SPACE 1899
NEW PILASTER ADDED 1899
OFFICE SPACE
DOOR AND WINDOW PATTERN ALTERED FROM ORIGINAL
LOG
NEW WINDOWS
BUILDING PAINTED TO Y.G.G. IN 1907
N.C. CO. STORE const. 1897
ADDITION const. 1898
KING STREET ANNEX const. 1897
N.C. CO. OFFICE BUILDING const. 1898
YUKON GOLD CO. OFFICE BUILDING const. 1897

annotated streetscape
fig. 51 KING STREET ca. 1908

APPENDIX WALLPAPER IN THE OFFICE OF THE U.S. CONSUL, NORTHERN COMMERCIAL CO. BUILDING, DAWSON, Y.T.[1]

The wallpaper depicted in the U.S. consulate (Fig. 38) appears identical to the wallpaper Eatons' Spring and Summer Catalogue 1903 pattern number 946, printed in two grades. Figure 38 does not focus clearly enough for one to determine which grade decorated the wall. One would expect it to be the higher "embossed gilt" grade because this was more suitable for a consul's office. It appears to be the lower "gilt" grade. According to Eaton's catalogue, pattern 946 was available in either a gilt or embossed gilt. The former cost 10¢ per roll, was grounded in either green, grey, blue, or rich crimson and printed in harmonious colours with gold (highlights). The embossed gilt cost 12 1/2¢ per roll, was grounded in either deep crimson, ecru, or olive green, printed with harmonious colours and gold, and was embossed with a cheviot fabric embossing. Both were sold with a matching 18-inch border costing 5¢ per yard and a matching ceiling costing the same as the matching wallpaper. It is interesting that Eatons' illustration shows the 18-inch border better placed in relation to the wallpaper than the consulate's paperhanger fixed it (Fig. 38).

The wallpapers which Eatons sold were manufactured in Canada, the U.S., England, France, Germany and Japan during the first decade of the 20th and the last decade of the 19th century. Eatons' Canadian-made papers were manufactured by Watson, Foster and Co. of Montreal from 1893 on (some of these have been noted in Dawson, Y.T.), and by the Reg. N. Boxer Co., from 1908 on. Canadian manufacturers were said to print the same pattern (if it was a salable one) for as many as three years, each successive year in a different grade and colour scheme. The British reportedly printed the same pattern for as many as ten years, while the Americans printed new patterns every year. The price of Eatons' wallpapers ranged from 3¢ to $1.50 per roll (for lowest grade of brown blank to high grade Japanese tile). The price of gilt and embossed gilts ranged from 8¢ to 65¢ per roll, hence the above price of 10¢ to 12 1/2¢ per roll for pattern 946 is in the medium low range though mailing costs might raise it.

The style of the consulate paper with matching wall, 18-inch border and ceiling paper was popular in North America from the 1880s to the First World War. The wallpapers pictured in Eatons' catalogue show many designs for wall, border and ceiling from 1893 to 1911 (when borders began to get smaller). Two features of border design, i.e. the blended background and a large motif alternating with a small motif, featured in the consulate paper, are also noted in Eatons' catalogue papers. "Blended and clouded," "rich shaded matching borders" were sold from 1896 to 1910, and those with alternating large and small motifs were noted from 1901 to 1908. A sample book of another Canadian wallpaper

manufacturer dated about 1900 shows blended borders in two or three colours. Hence the style of the consulate paper in Figure 38 was a popular one and followed the trend in design between 1901 and 1908.

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16 "New Buildings," Dawson Weekly News, 17 June 1937, p. 4.
17 "Extensive New Improvements," Dawson Daily News, 27 November 1922, p. 10.
18 "N.C.Co. Store Destroyed by Fire," Dawson Weekly News, 13 December 1951, p. 1.
19 "Old Timers Given a Fine New Home," Dawson Daily News, 21 April 1921, p. 4.
20 Dawson City Fire Department Records. Log Book, Vol. 16, January 1949 -December 1954, p. 212; L.D. Kitchener, op. cit., p. 206.

Conclusions

1 "Extensive New Improvements," Dawson Daily News, 27 November 1922, p. 10.

Appendix

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